

BEADLE'S Dime New York Library

Copyrighted, 1896, by BEADLE AND ADAMS.

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

June 10, 1896.

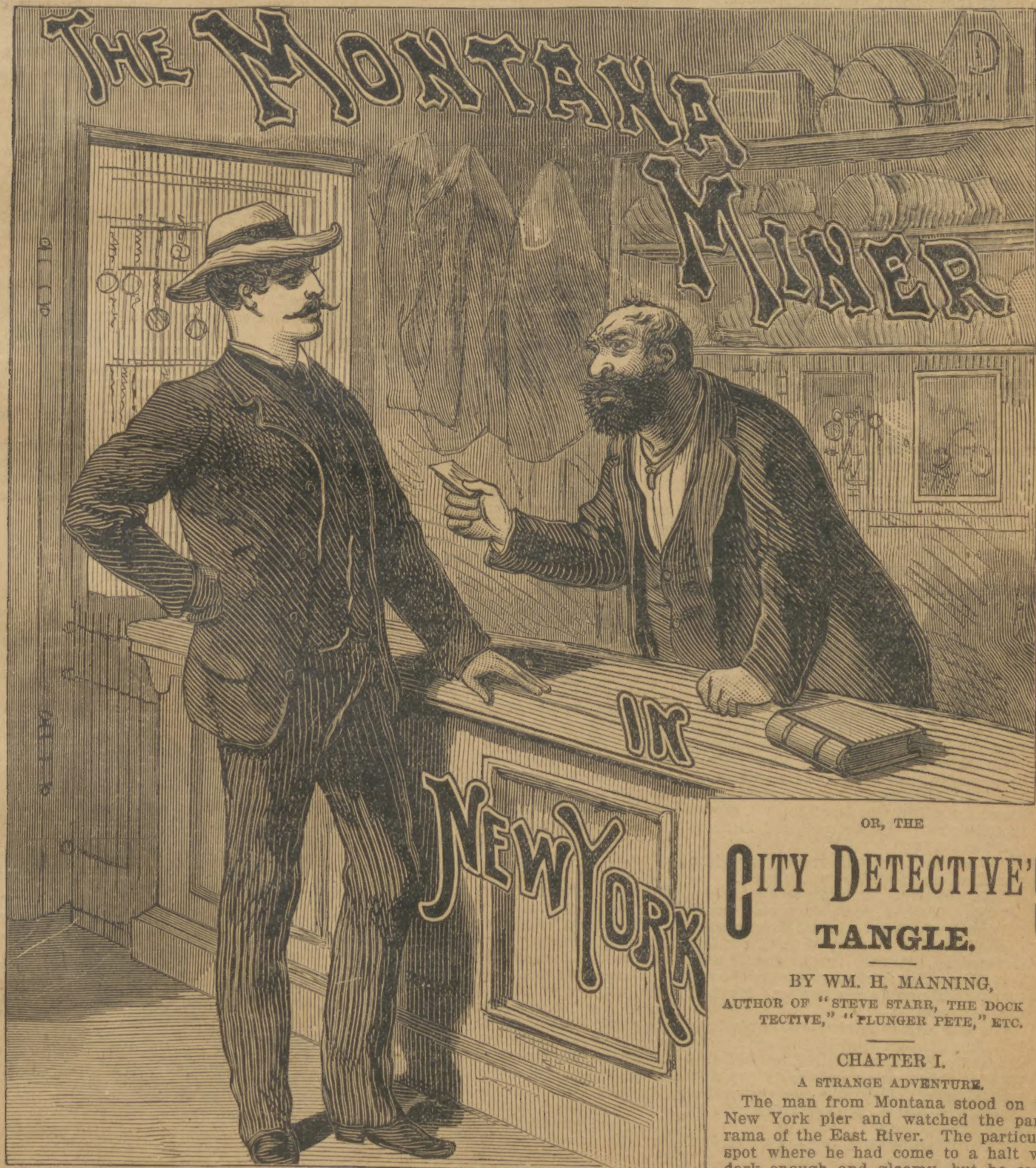
No. 920.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXXI.



LEVI LEANED FORWARD OVER THE COUNTER AND BENT HIS ANXIOUS EYES
UPON THE MONTANA MINER.

OR, THE

CITY DETECTIVE'S TANGLE.

BY WM. H. MANNING,

AUTHOR OF "STEVE STARR, THE DOCK DE-
TECTIVE," "FLUNGER PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

The man from Montana stood on the New York pier and watched the panorama of the East River. The particular spot where he had come to a halt was dark enough and gloomy, but he cared nothing for that. Danger he was accustomed to and did not fear, so he

thought nothing of it. His indifference seemed well-founded for a time, but he soon had a shock.

Out from the shadows and the piles of barrels and boxes that littered the pier, a figure appeared to his view. He looked keenly. The object had the appearance of a woman, but, for a moment, he was not sure whether it was woman or ghost.

Straight toward him hastened the object.

"I say, hold on there!" he warned.

"Sir," was the quick response, "I want to speak with you!"

"Oh, you're that, are you? Well, drive away, but—oblige me by keeping a little nearer to yourself and more remote from me!"

Benjamin Richardson, prospector, miner and adventurer, was still somewhat in awe of this visitor, and backed off a pace. She, however, gave this no heed and went on hurriedly:

"I have been robbed!"

"Robbed, eh? Well, I didn't do it."

"I know that, but I have met with a terrible loss! A man rushed upon me suddenly, and I was flung back against one of those boxes and half stunned."

"Was his haul anything rich?"

The woman wrung her hands distractedly.

"It was much to me and to others—it was everything! It was money, honor, justice and the work of a lifetime!"

"Well, that does come pretty near being valuable. So he made off with it? Where did he go?"

"I know not. The thing he wrested from my grasp is there!" and she moved to the edge of the pier and pointed down to the water.

"There!" echoed Richardson.

"It was dashed from my grasp into the river."

"Didn't he get anything, then?"

"Nothing; but, what I so prized is gone—gone forever!" and again she wrung her hands, and the miner was moved to a deep interest.

"Some things can be recovered from the drink," bluntly assured Benjamin. "What was the nature of this treasure of yours?"

"I cannot tell you. It was all that I have said—money, justice and honor. More than that I cannot say. Oh, sir, I am ruined, and the innocent will suffer for this night's work!"

She sobbed audibly, and the miner lost no part of his interest.

"I suppose you live near here?" he questioned.

"No."

"No? Then why the dickens were you here? It is night, and New York life by the piers is not the safest sort at this hour for a man, much less for a woman."

"I was seeking to throw this man off my track."

"Then he had followed you?"

"Yes, from my hotel. I came out, and soon discovered that I was being dogged. I am almost a stranger in New York—now—and when I sought to throw him off the track I made a terrible mistake and found myself in this desolate spot. It was just the place for his attack, and he made good use of it."

"Well, well, we will try to have him punished, and your loss made good."

"No power on earth can do that."

"No? Then I don't suppose I could cut much of a swath. Still, I am a good deal of a fellow in my region. I am Ben Richardson, miner, sometimes called Bear-Claim Ben; and anybody who knows me will tell you I am a hustler. Maybe I can help you."

He was plainly anxious to do his best, but the unknown woman had apparently ceased to listen to him. She bent forward over the water and looked down in painful grief. Suddenly she wrung her hands once more and her voice rose in anguished lament.

"Oh! what shall I do?—what shall I do?" she cried.

"Try to recover what you've lost," sensibly suggested the hustler, moving

closer to her. "If the article was light of weight the water has surely carried it off, but if it was heavy it must have sunk. Was it paper, parcel or box?"

"I cannot explain."

"Then you can't be very anxious to recover it."

"I am—I am terribly eager to get it! All I am or hope to be depends upon it. More, the welfare of others depends upon it. Justice demands its recovery! Poor Alaric!—poor Alaric!" she moaned.

"Who is he? The name brings up ancient wars, rather than present kings. I don't suppose your Alaric is the old Visigoth, so we need not discuss him. But come! Go with me, and I will summon the aid needed. If the thing be recoverable no time should be lost. We must get a hustle on!"

Turning slowly from the water she faced the Man from Montana. From a warehouse near a light burned in its second story—the only break in the darkness. This light fell dimly upon Richardson's face, thus bringing him for the first time fully into the view of the woman. She looked—she suddenly started.

"You—you!" she excitedly exclaimed.

"How's that, ma'am?"

"You are the man who robbed me!"

"Nonsense!"

"I saw him plainly—you are he! The same figure, the same dress and same full beard. You are the robber!"

Her agitation was gone, and in its place was wrath and revenge.

The miner well knew the danger to him of such an accusation.

"Now, see here, ma'am, that's ridiculous. I had no hand in the robbery. Would I have come here if I'd been the robber?"

"Just the reason why you should come."

"To be arrested?"

"To try again to get the article you failed to get before."

"Nonsense!"

"You are the man! I know it; I can swear to it. You shall not escape punishment!"

She was deeply in earnest, but, even that assertion did not prepare Montana Ben for what happened.

She leaped upon him like a tigress, and, wholly unprepared, the shock forced him back.

He stumbled, fell against a box and only saved himself from a ground lay-out by grasping the box.

The woman fared worse, for she pitched forward helplessly, as she uttered the wild cry:

"Murder!—murder!"

Then there was a sullen splash, as over the string piece of the pier she went headlong.

Benjamin leaped to his feet.

Another cry rung out.

"Help here! Murder is being done!"

The outcry had come from the lighted room of the warehouse, and the man from Montana realized that the occurrence had had a witness! But Ben Richardson did not think of that then. The woman was in the river, and, unless speedily rescued, would probably be drowned!

To get on a hustle was in order, then, so over the stringpiece he leaped, into the stream!

Strong swimmer that he was, the Man from Montana had only one thought—to find the woman.

He expected to see and to hear her, but he did neither; the darkness was pronounced, and no sound arose to help him.

Where was she? Eyes and ears were strained, yet no sign of her. The water bubbled and flowed, carrying him to one side, but he seemed to be alone in the stream between the two piers.

"She must have hit something in her fall and been stunned," was his final explanation.

He continued to swim about for some time, and finally went so far river-ward that he was caught in the full force of the tide and made to feel what it was.

He now was growing weary, and, as there seemed to be no longer any hope

of rescuing her alive, he had to think of himself. Striking out anew he reached the pier opposite to that on which he had met with his adventure, and, after exceeding exertion, found himself again on the pier, almost exhausted.

But he was not to rest, for on the other pier, and close to where he had talked with the unknown woman, he discovered four men, who were gesticulating and talking excitedly and looking into the dark tide below them.

"A party drawn by the alarm!" decided Miner Ben. "That fellow in the big building has summoned help. Shall I go over and set them to work in a systematic manner, or shall I put in a disappearance and so save trouble to yours truly?" he asked himself.

He concluded to act the part of wisdom—to wait and watch, and then determine what was best to do.

"It was a clear case of murder!" he heard one of them declare.

"And the victim was a woman?"

"Yes."

"Then I would just like to get my hands on the scoundrel. Such a man deserves to be swung up off-hand."

"How did it all happen, and how do you know about it?" asked a new speaker.

"It's like this: I am Roger Hanks, night watchman in that warehouse over there. I happened to look out and see a man and a woman on the pier. They were talking in a very animated way, and all of a sudden they showed me that they wasn't good friends. She accused him of robbing her."

"I made out that they didn't know each other, and suppose he had followed her to the pier. She declared she was going to have him arrested, and then he attacked her."

Benjamin's eyes opened widely.

"Oh, that's the lay-out, is it?" he muttered.

"The man leaped right at her, and caught her and flung her into the dock. Yes, it was a plain case of murder; she even cried out that he was murdering her. It was her last word. She must be drowned now, poor thing!"

"What's to be done?" inquired one of the men.

"Done?" repeated the watchman.

"Why, there has been a foul murder, and we must see that the murderer does not escape. He may still be near. Hunt for him at once!"

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER ADVENTURE.

Bear-Claim Ben now realized the peril of the situation. Chance had made it seem as if he was all that the night watchman asserted, and, as he was a stranger in New York, it might go hard with him if he was discovered and taken.

"It won't do for me to be discovered," he thought. "I am in this city on a mission of just vengeance, and can't afford to get mixed up with anybody else's affairs. I'll skip!"

He looked about for means of doing so. Of course he could not walk out off the pier, for, dark as the place was, this was pretty certain to bring discovery.

"I've got to crawl off!"

The voice of the watchman floated over to him:

"Yes, I had a sort of a look at him. He was a stout-built man, with a full beard. I shall know him by his whiskers, if I see him again."

"Where did you say he went to?"

"After he flung the woman into the water I rushed away from the window too quick to watch him, but I don't believe he went to the street. I reckon he is hiding on this pier, now."

Ben Richardson smiled grimly.

"While you hunt that pier I'll vacate this one!" he planned.

He began his "crawl," and, hugging the stringpiece of the pier closely, he made the best time he could toward the street. He reached the extremity of the pier in safety. Then, the darkness fa-

voring, he struck out across the street—his danger over for the time being.

"Their interference settles the woman's case, though," he mused. "Deprived of my help she must have succumbed before now, even if she was alive when I left the water."

He soon left the vicinity behind, and then his ready wits pictured the case as it really was—the trouble in store for him.

He was accused of deliberate murder, and the watchman had a fair idea of how he looked. Friendless as he was in the city, it would be hard for him to break the accusation if it was brought against him.

"There mustn't any be brought!" he decided. "I've got to ward it off. How?"

His hand strayed to his full brown beard.

"This has got to come off. But, if it does, won't the people at my hotel think odd of it? Sure! What then? Why, I've got to give that hotel the shake, this very night. My bill is paid a week ahead, and they won't kick if I do skip. I've got work to do, and it's vitally important I should be free to act."

He thought it all over, and ended by remaining in a secluded place until considerably after midnight; then he set out for his hotel.

He was not noticed especially on the street nor when he reached the hotel, so his wet garments escaped attention. Proceeding direct to his room, he there at once prepared for departure, to "skip," as he expressed it.

To shave off the bounteous beard was but the work of a little while, and soon his fine face stood out in all its strong features. Only his mustache remained.

This done, he changed his clothing, took his valise and left the building. He met nobody on the way, and, as far as he could see, he was not noticed by anybody.

His tastes were not luxurious. He had been at a modest hostelry and now sought for another of the same sort. He found one. Like the quarter of the city in which it was located it was a rough-and-ready place, which suited Ben Richardson, miner.

In possession of a new room and its accompaniments, his mind was at ease again.

For reasons of his own he had passed at his previous quarters under an assumed name. This time he gave his true name, to show if need be, that he was not afraid to use it.

He rose after a four hours' sleep and had breakfast, and, while thus occupied, he read a morning paper. In its columns he found a full account of the events on the pier, as Roger Hanks, the watchman, had seen them. The latter and his associates had found nothing of the woman, and nothing of her supposed assailant, but they had gone to the police, so the newspaper stated.

"Pleasant state of affairs," mused the Montana Miner. "If they get me into their clutches the Bear Claim will never see its owner again. Have I come all the way from the Montana ranges to be done up thus? If I have, I hope I can put in my own fine work first."

To add to his security, he took some sort of liquid from his capacious valise and browned his face where the beard had been shaved off, seemingly having prepared for just such an emergency.

This done he was as well disguised as could be hoped for.

That day he was a busy man. He was out of doors all the while, and, until nearly supper-time, occupied in walking the streets. His object was better known to himself than to those he met, but he scanned people closely, and showed a singular interest in business signs, which he read as he went. He was not so ignorant of city life as to fail to be aware that there was such a thing as a directory, but he knew it was then some ten months old, so it might not direct him correctly.

Before and after supper he rested awhile, and then he sallied forth again.

His hotel was well on the East Side, but he went further that way and wandered, still scanning people and business signs.

Ultimately reaching the East River, he then turned back in his strange and tireless journey. Again he plodded on until nearing the Bowery, when there was a sudden change in the monotony of the situation.

Usually there were but few passers-by on the side streets at that hour, but on the present occasion that some people were abroad he was made to see.

First view showed Benjamin that events out of the ordinary course were occurring. Mechanically he noticed a carriage proceeding at slow pace, but there was something of more interest just then.

Two men were on the sidewalk close to the vehicle, engaged in a struggle. Clapsed in each other's arms they swayed back and forth, each seeking to overcome the other.

"A fight!" exclaimed the Man from Montana. "Now, that's something like! I'll take it in!"

He hastened toward the spot, but, as he did so, his attention was diverted. From the window of the carriage he saw an arm emerge. The accompanying hand was slender, and the dress of a woman showed back of the wrist.

More, the hand clasped a revolver, and the weapon was pointed toward the struggling men.

Ben Richardson was immediately alert.

"Hold up," he cried. "No unfair tactics here, or—"

The report of the revolver drowned the rest. The unseen woman had fired, and the weapon had still been pointed toward the struggling pair.

"Stop it!" added the miner, sharply. "I'll take a hand in this!"

He was perfectly willing, but the chance was not given. Suddenly the driver of the carriage plied his whip, and the vehicle went hastily away toward the western end of the block.

Richardson was uncertain. He could not run the fleeing marksman down without leaving the rest of the actors in the drama, and, as both kept their feet and continued their struggle, he decided on another line of conduct.

"The woman may have been full of sand," he muttered, "but she was a mighty poor shot to miss at that distance. I'll look to these wrestlers from Wartown!"

It was time for somebody to interfere. The younger of the pair was getting the better of his adversary. He had bent him over his knee and was fast rendering him helpless.

Ben stepped forward and removed his hat politely.

"Gents," he spoke, in suave tones, "I don't want to disturb your matinee, if both of you are agreed, but could you suspend operations long enough to tell me whether this is a personal scrap or highway robbery. I never mix in when old scores are being settled, but I am sure death on highwaymen!"

Plainly, his presence had not been suspected by the men until he spoke. His interference worked to the disadvantage of the prospective victor, who stopped short and looked at the new comer.

He must have relaxed his hold, too, for the second man was active in a moment. He sent up a stroke with his fist which caught his opponent neatly, and the latter staggered back from the blow.

The second man dropped to the sidewalk, but quickly began to scramble up. Then the baffled victor took on new life, and, turning, he dashed away at full speed in the direction the carriage had gone.

Bear-Claim Ben stood in indecision. He looked at the fugitive and then at the only remaining participant in the drama.

"Say," he quickly demanded, "was it highway robbery or scrimmage?"

"Personal fight," was answered.

"Then I won't mix in. Hurt, stranger?"

The person last referred to had spoken huskily, and did not seem any too firm on his feet. He now braced up somewhat and looked around.

"Where has he gone?" he asked, brokenly.

"Gone? Oh! he is out of sight. Shows he is a sprinter. Well, at the rate he is traveling he will soon be in Jersey City."

"He escaped me. Curse the luck!"

"That's the way a fellow feels when he has lost a card that looked like a winner, but somebody has got to lose—that's the way we look at it in my section. Take it easy, pard!"

"Take it easy?" echoed the stranger, hotly. "How can I when Albert Charleston has escaped me?"

Ben Richardson started as if shot, and his face grew stern and hard of expression. Sharply his voice rung out:

"What's that? Who did you say? The name, man, the name!"

CHAPTER III.

BEN SEEKS VENGEANCE.

The Montana Miner caught his companion by the arm, and his eyes blazed in a manner that made the unknown man shrink back. He looked worried and frightened.

"What have I done?" he asked, uneasily.

"The name, I say, the name!" repeated Miner Ben.

"Why, as I just mentioned, Albert Charleston."

"Well, by thunder! that's rich!" was ejaculated with vim. "Do you—" and Bear-Claim Ben tightened his hold on the other.

"Do you know where he lives?"

"I know it is on Third street, near Avenue A, but I don't know the number."

"Have you hunted for him there?"

"Well, I looked some. His name ain't in the directory, so I didn't locate him exact. I run onto him ter-night by accident."

Richardson had been excited, but all trace of emotion was now gone.

"Who are you?" he asked.

There was brief hesitation, and then the man replied:

"My name is Hickman Ransom, commonly called Hick."

Ben glanced at the shaggy hair and beard and rough clothes of his companion.

"You don't live in New York?"

"No. I'm from Herkimer County. When winter is around I'm a trapper up that way."

"And are you now a trapper down here?"

"Eh?"

"You were in a muss with this Albert Charleston. You knew him by name; he must be an old acquaintance. What's up between you and him? Is he an enemy of yours?"

"To the death, neighbor; to the death!"

"What's he done to you?"

A sudden change came to the Herkimer man's face.

"Never mind that," he responded; "I can't tell you what. It's enough that I'm his enemy. I'm in New York now ter square accounts with him, by gum!"

"Do you want help?"

"Help? No, I don't; I kin manage my own case."

"What is it? What has he done to you?"

"Never mind. I can't tell all I know. Let's drop it."

"Just as you say. One thing more: Do you know a revolver shot was fired during your waltz with Charleston?"

"Say, I thought I heard one. Who fired?—you or the villain I was after?"

"Neither. Didn't you see the woman in the carriage?"

"There was a carriage coming down the street when I tackled Charleston, but,

after that, I was too busy to notice what became of it. What of the woman?"

"A woman's hand was thrust out of the door of the go-cart, and she fired at you—or Charleston. Which did she try to wing?"

"I don't know, and I don't know her. A woman? Well, that's odd."

"She meant business. There was no play in her shooting, you can bet high. A mysterious woman, eh? Well, New York seems to be full of them. But, never mind that now, my friend. Look here! Are you going to hunt this Charleston some more?"

"You just bet I am!"

"I shall be interested to learn how you come out, even if you refuse to state what is up; so tell me where you stop, and it may be I can give you a lift when the fence gets too high for you. I hail from Montana, where men fight to get up an appetite. I am owner of the Bear Mine in that section, camp of Shagbark. I am a tolerably good man to have around at a pistol matinee; so, if you need me, try me!"

Realizing that his new acquaintance might be of help to him, the Herkimer hunter gave his address and intimated that he was willing to be helped.

They parted and the miner walked on alone.

"I have made a gain," he meditated. "Unless this man was all to the wrong, I know about where Albert Charleston lives, and with the clew I am not afraid of failing to finish the thing up. Tomorrow I will call on my man, and he can rest assured there will be a settlement in a way he won't like."

Ben's face grew hard and unpleasant of expression. The man who had incurred his wrath was not to be envied.

He walked the streets no more aimlessly, but hastened to his hotel and went to bed. Peacefully he slept, and, in the morning, peacefully he had breakfast. There was just one drawback to his contentment—the newspapers announced that search was being vigorously made for the man with the full beard who had dealt so foully with the woman on the pier. They called it murder, and Ben did not like the charge.

"I'm afraid I shall get into trouble over this," he mused. "What if they do get the thief who robbed her? Will that help me? Not any! I was the man who was with her when she tumbled into the water, and that dunce of a watchman says she was flung in. Humph! This is a fine shadow to have hanging over a fellow. I may be arrested at any minute, and, if I am, this isn't Shagbark Camp by a long shot!"

At ten o'clock he left the hotel. Straight toward the section where Hick Ransom had said his man was to be found the Man from Montana took his way, and, once near the junction of the two streets, he began his work.

Entering a grocery store, he made a small purchase and opened conversation.

"I suppose you know about all the folks around here?"

"Yes," responded the grocer.

"Anybody named Albert Charleston?"

"Sure!"

"Lives near here, eh?"

"Yes, on Third street," and the speaker gave the number.

"Old man?"

"Not over twenty-six, I guess."

"Live alone?"

"No, with his father and sister. I believe there is an old aunt there, too. The name on the door is not Charleston."

Ben was further told that Albert was then a law-student, and that he was well liked and respected by all—he was a trifle wild, perhaps, the grocer added, but honest and manly, and decidedly popular.

This was information not fully to his liking, but he did not allow that to influence him.

"A man's neighbors don't always know him well," he muttered, as he proceeded

to the house indicated and rung the bell. There was but little delay at the door. A servant came, he was informed that Albert Charleston was in, and then, after he was conducted to the parlor, the girl went to summon Charleston.

Ben surveyed his surroundings. The house was plain, but comfortable, like the home of people who had enough to live well without any show.

Presently a young man entered the room, and the caller saw a well-dressed man of gentlemanly exterior. He had an air almost aristocratic, but the other did not let that keep him from business.

"Albert Charleston?" he asked.

"Yes. That's my name."

The young man's manner showed some curiosity, but he was quite composed.

"I take it you don't know me?" pursued Ben.

"I never saw you before."

"Sure? How about Shagbark Camp, Montana?"

"I never heard of the place."

"I have. I live there, though it's a mercy that I do. Brush up your memory a bit, partner; and I think you'll remember me. I am Ben Richardson, and I've come all this ways to square a debt with you!"

CHAPTER IV.

A DEMAND FOR SATISFACTION.

The miner was quite calm of manner. An observer would not have suspected that the debt he had to "square" was anything serious, and if Albert Charleston thought it was serious, his own manner did not betray such a knowledge.

"I don't comprehend what you mean," he responded.

"Well, let us come at it systematically. You were in the West last summer, eh?"

Charleston hesitated for a moment, and the miner saw a peculiar expression hover on his face. Presently he answered quietly:

"I was."

"Likewise, in Shagbark."

"I never heard of such a place."

"Nor of the Black Butte Hills?"

"Of course, I have heard of the Black Butte Hills. Who has not?"

"Yet, you did not go to Shagbark when there?—nor ever hear of the Bear Mine?"

"Wait a bit! You seem to assume that I have been in the Black Butte Hills. I never was there."

"Ever hear of Bear-Claim Ben, the miner?"

"Never!"

"You admit that you went West. Pray, where did you spend your little vacation?"

"I do not see that my route is of consequence. You appear to want a man who has been to the Black Butte Hills and to the camp or town of Shagbark, if there is such a place. I never was there. I am not interested in your business. I regret that I can do nothing for you—"

"You've done it already!" exclaimed Ben, his manner changing suddenly and unpleasantly.

"What have I done?"

"For one thing, put a rifle ball into my anatomy!"

"Ridiculous! I never saw you before this morning!"

"This is to be expected," returned Ben, coolly. "I knew, of course, that you would deny it. Now, to save argument, let us imagine that we have talked about this for two hours; that I have stuck to my charge and you have denied it all along. We can save time by skipping all such preliminaries. What do you say?"

"You can also imagine me denying it for a couple of hours more!" was retorted. "I know nothing of what you are talking about. It is all Greek to me. I never was in the Black Butte Hills."

"Good! You say it bravely, but, now, let's consider it done. You stole my gold and shot me through the ribs. I've

come to square the account, and I am going to do it, by thunder!"

"How will you do it?"

"My plan is to kill you!"

"Well, that's cool!"

"Death always is cool!"

"You come into my father's house and make such an assertion?"

"I think you heard my warble."

"Why, you Western desperado, do you know you are in New York and dare to say a thing like that?"

"I did pluck up sand to say it, didn't I?"

"Say it again, and you will land in the police station."

"Charleston, I knew you would say that, too; men always play their bluff in such games. Now, to save time, let us imagine you have repeated it several times, and so get to business. I am not a ruffian, if some other folks are. I've come all this way to square the debt, but I will give you a show—a far better one than you gave me out in the Hills. Are you some on the shoot?"

"Yes."

"How will a duel suit you?"

"I decline."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes. Nature gave me hands, and that's enough for me. If you make yourself ugly, I shall chastise you."

"Consider that said fully, too. Now, to business. I think we have gone through the regulation preliminaries. Let me tell my story."

"You needn't trouble."

"It won't jar my feelings a bit. I live at Shagbark. I own the Bear Mine there, wherefore people usually call me Bear-Claim Ben. Candor compels me to say that the mine isn't big to look at, and I worked it all alone."

"There was a girl in Shagbark that I fell to adoring—men will do such things; it's a weakness of theirs. It was weak in me. Well, events followed in this way: I bought the mine; I fell in love; I vowed to have money and wife. I grew rich; I gained her love; I proposed; I was accepted. All was merry at Shagbark, and things just hummed. It looked as if I was cut out for a happy Benedict. I wasn't, however."

"One day a fellow shot me in the back, long range, with a rifle. He left me for dead, and he just missed being right by the breadth of a hair. I had an ugly wound, and it was a matter of weeks before terrestrial things interested me any more."

"I was found, brought back to town, nursed and brought about after a long wrestle with Death. When I got well two things interested me. I asked after them."

"Where was my hoarded money? Gone! The skunk who had shot me had also stolen all my cash and dust."

"Why wasn't my sweetheart by my side? Because she had thrown me over when she learned I had lost my dust! She had made love to a richer man and was then Mrs. Somebody-or-other."

"To sum it up, the man with the rifle had filled me with lead and put me flat on my back for weeks; he had stolen my money; he had been the indirect cause of my sweetheart going back on me, and, when I mended, there I was a moneyless, deserted wreck."

"A good constitution stood by me in one way—I fully recovered my health. Did I seek to recover my sweetheart? Not if the deponent knoweth his history—not for Ebenezer! I let her slide. Did I go to work to dig more gold? No! Why? I had other business."

"When I lay there flat on my back I vowed to have satisfaction on the fellow who had done all this to me. I repeated the vow when I was on my feet. I repeat it now. I've come to square the debt!"

Ben Richardson grew harsh again, and his companion would have been blind to ignore the dangerous signs. With less irritability, Charleston asked:

"Do you really accuse me of being that man?"

"You just bet I do!"

"I am not. Why do you think I am?"

"You gave that name at Shagbark—Albert Charleston."

"I never was there. Why do you think I was?"

"Didn't put up at Pete Bell's hotel?"

"I never heard of it."

"How about this letter?"

The Montana Miner produced a sheet of paper, but delayed about presenting it. Instead, he went on in explanation:

"When I got up it was easy to get tidings of the man who had shot me. I learned that he had put up at Pete's, and that he had skipped as soon as he shot me—it was the way of a common, everyday robber. He wanted my dust; he got it and run off."

"At Pete's he had given the name of Smith, but he left one betraying sign behind him. It was a letter—this letter. You shall see it, but beware how you tamper with it."

"It is written to Albert Charleston, at Shagbark Camp, and was, a mere note from a friend somewhere, it seems. It is dated two weeks before I was shot, but does not state where it was written."

"Besides the letter there was a receipt made out about the same time by which the said Albert Charleston was proven to have paid for a revolver to some man I have not located."

"Thus, you will see that though my assassin passed as Smith at the camp, he accidentally left lots of papers showing his true name. Here is the latter!"

He handed it over to his suspect. The New Yorker read it with interest. It was as follows:

"Albert Charleston, Esq."

"Dear Pard: This is just a line to tell you we are all humping as usual in this burgh. Gold is being discovered more freely than before, and we think you were foolish to get discouraged on such short experience. My advice is that you come back and try it again. We have added ninety-six souls to our population on account of the dust lately taken out. Don't you want to try it again? We all want you back. Why not come? Regards from the boys and myself."

JACK TURNER."

The reader looked up, and then Ben quietly remarked:

"You would have done better to stay with Jack."

"This letter is not mine!" firmly asserted Charleston.

"Isn't that your name at the head of it?"

"Yes, it is; Albert Charleston."

"Maybe you claim that you didn't know Jack?"

"I do claim it. I never heard of him. This letter is not mine, I repeat, I never saw it until now."

"Anything more?"

"I never dug gold in any place; I never was in Montana."

"You say you went West last summer?"

"I went West, sir, but not to Montana."

"Where did you go when West? By whom can you prove that you were not at Shagbark when I was shot?"

"I hardly think I can prove it, but it is enough that I am not your man."

"Enough! Your guilt stands out plain. You admit that you were West, and, if that's so, you must know those who could prove where you were. If you refuse to offer such proof you stand proven guilty."

CHAPTER V.

A SERIOUS NOTE OF ALARM.

Bear-Claim Ben had grown inexorable of manner again, but Charleston once more showed his own courage.

"That will do, sir!" he exclaimed. "I am not going to be browbeaten. Don't think you can come out of the Wild West and frighten anybody here. I am not in the least afraid of you."

"I am glad of that. I told you I would give you a chance to fight for your life,

and I will do it. We will have our little duel, but, before we do it, there is one thing more. When you shot me you also robbed me of a cool five thousand dollars. Before we have the duel you must hand over that sum to me."

"Aha! now you speak out!" cried Albert. "So this is a blackmailing scheme!"

Ben Richardson had been very cool, but now, his manner changed. He started and his color changed. Through the bronze hue of his cheek came a striking pallor.

"Blackmail!" he gasped. "Me?"

"So it seems."

"The man who says it is a liar! Why, man, I'll lick the boots off of you!—but why get riled up by your squirming? Of course you want to make a bluff. You've made it—but don't do it again—don't! I can't stand it, an' I won't!"

"If you persist in your absurd claims you will have to put up with a good many things," boldly retorted Charleston. "Not one penny will you get out of me; your blackmailing scheme will not go."

"I'm a patient man," muttered Ben, rubbing his forehead hard and speaking huskily, "but this is too much that you ask of me. I won't be called a blackmailer!"

"Then cease to deserve it."

"Maybe you think I will let up on that money part. I won't! I call for the five thousand, and I am going to have it. Money first, and then the duel."

"You will get neither from me. Now, I think I can better occupy my time—I will see you to the door."

"What's that?"

"I will dispense with your company now. You can go."

Ben looked at Albert in a bewildered way. He could not understand him. He had seen brave men, rash men and foolish men in his day. All were a little like this city man, but not exactly. Albert perplexed him, and his ideas did not seem to flow with their usual readiness. He was like a man in the dark, groping for light.

While he still groped, footsteps sounded outside, and, after a pause the door opened and another man walked in from the hall.

He was of middle age and stoutly built—a fine specimen of mature manhood. Ben noticed that, and he fell to admiring the older man at once. He had seen leading men in the mining camps who looked just about like this firm-faced newcomer.

There was a pause. Albert did not seem pleased to see the addition to their numbers. On the contrary, he was decidedly flustered, and sat with agitation and dismay which would have been noticeable had not his face been in shadow.

The elder man left them in uncertainty but a moment; then he bowed and broke the silence.

"Pardon me," he requested. "I did not know that any one was here. I did not intend to intrude."

He took a backward step, but Ben's voice suddenly came into the gap.

"You don't intrude. This is only a little call of mine. I think"—he surveyed the elder man more critically—"that you may be a relative of my companion here."

"I am. We are slightly related; I am his father! My name is Irad Charleston. Albert, you seem to have lost your tongue. Introduce your friend."

"Yes, go ahead, Al!" coolly directed Ben, waving his hand.

"This—is—"

Albert stumbled painfully, and the miner finished for him:

"Ben Richardson, right from Shagbark Camp, Black Butte Hills."

"Aha!" cried the elder Charleston, "this recalls your Western trip, Albert. Is this a friend you made out there?"

Albert, looking wretched enough, made a cautionary gesture to Ben.

"Yes," he admitted.

"That's straight," added the miner. "We did meet out there. We had some great times, didn't we, Al?"

There was an apology for a reply which

was not very indistinct. Ben clearly saw that Albert was deeply anxious to keep his father from knowing what was charged against him, and the miner took malicious pleasure in adding to his discomfort.

"Ever told your father about that little shooting match of yours?—I was mentioning it just before Mr. Charleston came in, you know. Great shot, that was, of yours, Al!"

"I never heard the story, I think," replied Mr. Charleston.

"Tell it, Al!" urged Ben, grimly.

"I don't feel like it, just now," muttered the alarmed man.

"You felt like it then, young pard," pursued Ben, simulating enthusiasm.

"You winged your man, didn't you? Great times we had at Shagbark."

"I never was West," remarked Mr. Charleston.

"Your son was. I met him there. It was there he did his big shooting act. Tell about it, Al."

The miner was getting into most bounding spirits. He liked to see Albert writhe under the lash of fear. It was exhilarating sport for Benjamin.

"I will postpone it," replied Albert, plucking up some show of courage. "My father is looking tired."

"So I am," admitted Irad Charleston. "I've had a hard trip this morning. Of course, you know, Mr. Richardson—Albert must have told you—that I am a detective."

Benjamin started perceptibly.

"Eh? What's that?" he replied, in a changed voice.

"I am a city detective."

Nobody said anything.

"This morning," pursued Mr. Charleston, "I was called away at an early hour and put on new work. I've been running about until I'm tired out. You see, it is to hunt down the man who pushed the woman off of the East River pier to her death, as the papers have recorded!"

The man from the Black Butte Hills stared at the detective with wide-open eyes and speechless consternation. His gay manner had suddenly left him, and his expression was full of fright.

Was he to be arrested on the spot? Had he been tracked down so soon? Was he doomed?

"The case is one to call for zealous action on my part," added Mr. Charleston. "The poor woman was slain most foully, and vengeance must fall on the guilty wretch who sent her to sudden death."

Ben Richardson wiped his brow nervously, but Albert, glad of a chance to speak, and anxious to keep conversation on the subject, promptly inquired:

"Has the body been found?"

"No," answered the detective. "It seems to have been carried off by the river."

"Then the woman's identity has not been solved?"

"Not as yet."

"I infer that the slayer has not been arrested."

"He has not, but I trust it will soon be done."

"Have you any clew?"

"He is a man of rather rough dress and full beard."

"Is that all? He might change his clothes and cut off his beard."

Ben Richardson unconsciously raised his hand to his freshly-shaven face. He did not like this subject of conversation.

"Fortunately," replied the detective, "we have more of a clew than this. The stopping-place of the woman at the time of her death has been learned. It was the Good Report Hotel."

Again Ben had a shock. It was the Good Report Hotel he had been stopping at when the tragedy of the pier occurred—the place from which he had fled after the mishap!

"The slayer," pursued the elder Charleston, "was also a guest there. His name, or assumed name, was Robert Kemp!"

Ben breathed heavily. This was the name he had taken when first he came to

New York; the name by which he had been known until the affair on the pier had led him to change his quarters so abruptly.

"It was like this," continued the detective. "The woman, who was a Mrs. Snow—provided that was her real name—came recently to the Good Report Hotel, took a large room and seemed to have plenty of money. For several days she was in and out. Little was learned of her, for no honest person cared.

"Night before last she left the hotel as if for a walk. Recent investigations have shown that she was followed from the first by the man who finally took her life. Of course he was a robber.

"He dogged her steps to the pier, and there took her life—a villainous deed in all respects, and cowardly, too.

"Never mind! We have the clew, and the trail shall be followed sharply. The man who pushed her from the pier shall die for it!"

CHAPTER VI.

BEN GROWS MYSTERIOUS.

The detective made his statement with a quiet and businesslike air, as if he was retelling an ordinary piece of news. Ben Richardson did not think this was so. He was fully convinced that there was studied design in it all, and that Irad Charleston had solved his identity.

He watched to see if any furtive glances were sent his way, but if there were any concealed in the detective's course he was too shrewd to betray the fact.

"He will probably arrest me right away," thought Ben. "I may as well get in a word or two in my defense right now."

Irad had ended his story, and the miner broke his long silence.

"I suppose the proof is absolute that the fellow you have named was the one who did it?"

"The circumstantial evidence is satisfactory," replied the detective.

"You say he followed her from the hotel?"

"I cannot make it as sweeping as that. Several persons saw Mrs. Snow pass along eastward toward the river, and all saw the man with the full beard following her."

"And they can swear that the man was this Robert Kemp you have mentioned?"

"No. They do not know Kemp. We have solved his identity by induction. He wore a full beard and was a guest at the same hotel. He disappeared that night, taking all of his baggage with him. Of course he fled because he was guilty."

"Isn't that assuming a good deal?" asked Ben.

"Why should an innocent man flee at such a moment?"

Ben knew why an innocent man had done so, but he did not see fit to explain. He persisted in his argument.

"What proof is there that the man who followed her was not an entirely different person?"

"There is no proof. We simply put things together and draw our conclusions. I'll bet you something, sir, that I land this Robert Kemp in prison and convict him of the murder. Will you bet?"

"I don't think I will," answered Ben, with a seriousness that made Irad Charleston smile.

"You will see how simple it all is. The two persons, Mrs. Snow and Kemp, were companion guests at the hotel. There is no evidence to indicate that they were acquainted, and I do not think they were, but Kemp discovered that she had money, watched his chance, dogged her to the river, and accomplished his fiendish design. Don't you see?"

Ben dared not protest further.

"The reasoning is clear," he admitted.

"So it is."

"Well, where is Kemp now?"

"I hope to have him soon."

With this noncommittal reply Mr.

Charleston slowly drew a fragment of paper from his pocket.

"Here is something I found on the pier. Clearly, it bears on the case. You will notice that it is a remnant of a sheet of note paper. It lacks beginning and end, an" seems to have been torn from the original letter by accident or design. Here, Mr. Richardson, perhaps you would like to look at it."

The miner thought he would, and he took the fragment. The writing was bold and plain, and easy to read. It was as follows:

"Although the name, Mrs. Snow, is entirely unknown to us, we assume that you are acting in good faith, and, in consequence, we will deal with you in like manner. All that I have before said in this letter we will do faithfully. Keep your promise and you shall be richly paid. We want to know where Paul Anderson is, and we assume from your letter that you can tell us. Do this and your money reward shall be liberal. Paul Anderson is not only heir to \$200,000, but he is—"

Here the letter ended abruptly.

Ben had seen the last word, but a queer mood had come over him. He remained staring at the paper with enlarged eyes and a strangely set face.

If his companions had noticed this they could not have failed to be impressed, but Albert was looking fixedly at the floor, and his father, too, had fallen into thought. The mysterious emotion passed unseen.

Suddenly Ben looked up. He was quick to notice their abstraction, and he profited by it. Eager words had trembled on his lips, but he was wary enough to take time and control himself.

Presently he spoke in an easy way.

"Isn't there more of this?"

"No more," Mr. Charleston replied.

"What do you make of it?"

"Not much of anything."

"Who is Paul Anderson?"

"I don't know."

"Then this is no clew—"

"Oh! yes, it is decidedly a clew. We now know that Mrs. Snow was connected in some way with a certain Paul Anderson. This gives us more than her mere name to work on, and it ought to enable us to learn her situation in life, and, through that knowledge, find her relatives and so forth."

The Man from Montana nodded absently. The "clew" he had in mind was not in connection with the finding of light on Charleston's detective mystery.

"New York," added Irad, after a pause, "is full of secrets, sin, and suffering. I don't know that there is either in this case, but the terms of the note seem to indicate the one, and the other two may run side by side with the first. What drama lies back of this matter vaguely referred to in the note I know not."

"Are you likely to learn?"

"I think so."

"If you do, will you tell me?"

"I think I may safely say I will. You seem interested."

"A fragment like this," replied the miner, diplomatically, "cannot fail to arouse interest. To the question, Who was Mrs. Snow? is now added another question, Who was Paul Anderson?"

"True, true! Well, we will learn."

The detective folded the paper and turned to his son.

"I presume, Albert, that you have invited your friend to stop with us. That is quite right—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Ben, hastily, "but I shall be busy for a few days."

"Then come to us when you have more time. I shall also be busy. I shall be hot on the trail of the man who flung the unfortunate woman from the pier."

The Shagbark miner moved uneasily.

"Do you expect to succeed?"

"Yes," was the confident answer.

"Don't you think he has probably left the city?"

"He is still here. Criminals rarely

flee from New York. 'Where else in America is there such good chance to hide from prying eyes? Rely upon it, the villain is still here, and I will soon have him fast.'

Mr. Charleston arose, and Ben promptly followed his example. He was not now so anxious to force his quarrel with Albert. The more publicity he invited, the more danger there was that he would be identified with the man who had been on the pier. He felt only a strong desire to sink out of sight, and he was even wavering in his purpose of vengeance.

"I'll go now," he announced. "I'll see you all later."

Once more the wave of enmity surged to the front, and, with this assurance, he turned partially and fixed a threatening gaze upon the detective's son. Albert was looking puzzled. He remained puzzled, but that regard told him that the vendetta of the miner had only been put aside.

He would feel it later.

Irad Charleston was a grave man who rarely grew emotional. Now he felt that he ought to bid his son's "friend" a suitable adieu. He was proceeding to do this when Benjamin put a stop to all ceremony by marching out of the house abruptly.

The Man from Montana wanted to be alone of all things—to have quiet, solitude, and air; he felt as though there was scant breathing facilities around him just then.

Once on the street, he strode off hastily, never looking back, and covering several blocks at a rapid pace. Then he paused suddenly, stood stiff, and became a statue of meditation. His face was playing with emotions of some sort, and they finally found vent in words:

"Paul Anderson, eh? Paul Anderson! What the dickens—Say! this beats me! Paul Anderson heir to hard cash? Bah! it can't be! I have been humbugged, played with, tricked—but why should Irad Charleston do that? Yes, and how should he know—"

He ceased to mutter, but his strong face was still agitated and his manner most surprising. Deep, indeed, must be the interest of this new subject to make him forget, even for a time, his cherished mission of vengeance. Then he suddenly aroused.

"I'll look into it! Somebody must be alive—I'll look into it!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD DRAMA OF SLIPPERY ALLEY.

Rapidly Ben Richardson walked away. His course took him deeper into the poor quarter of the city, but he seemed well acquainted with his surroundings, and never noticed anything that was transpiring near at hand until he brought up at the side of a street which was about the humblest that could have been found on the east side.

There he paused, and his eyes became active.

"There's the alley," he muttered. "I might have known it would be there. I don't suppose the place has changed since Chris Columbus sailed the main. It's a sweet-looking hole."

The street was, in truth, but a narrow thoroughfare—a mere alley, dingy and dirty, with buildings on either side, leaning forward as if ambitious to close up the miserable gap.

"Poverty!" murmured Ben. "Poverty! What a life they lead! I never have been sorry I went to the West, where, at the very least, a man can feel his soul is his own, and not a thing cramped up in decaying hulks like these."

He passed in among these forlorn buildings. He had been there so often before that he could have gone blindfolded, so little had the passageway changed with the years.

Presently he reached a little court, and there he had luck at the start. A woman was carrying a pail of water past, and he recognized her at once. His face brightening with pleasure, he stepped forward.

"Hallo, Marm Gregor!" he exclaimed. She stopped, looked at him, and then shook her head.

"You've called my name," she admitted, "but I don't know you."

"Yet, you've seen me often."

"Sure, that must be wrong. I know you not. Yes, and men like you I never see in Slippery Alley. I don't know you."

"Think back!" Ben directed. "Don't focus your eyes on the last few weeks, but on the years past. Don't you remember me?"

"No, I don't remember you."

"You've had me on your knee more than once."

The woman, old, feeble, and worn, put back the tangled hair from her forehead.

"If a boy I've had on my knee has got to be a well-dressed man such as I see now, sure, the day of miracles has come again."

"Did you ever hear of Paul Anderson?"

Marm Gregor started.

"Paul!" she muttered. "Paul, the kid?"

"Paul, the kid, of Slippery Alley."

"I remember him well; but, sure, you don't mean—you can't be that Paul."

"I am he; I am Paul Anderson."

"What! Paul with good clothes on his back?"

"Well, tolerably good."

"And good-looking—but the kid was all of that. But you're joking me; you can't be Paul."

"Marm Gregor, look at me! I want you to decide that for yourself. Look at me! Am I Paul?"

She went closer to him. She had been doubtful and unbelieving, but now she was using her judgment without influence. She scanned his face intently.

"The same brow," she confessed, "and the eyes and hair—it seems madness, but if you say you are Paul I can believe it. I do believe it—you smile now, and it is Paul's smile. Why, child, child, has the world come so near an end that I see my lost ones? You, you the kid!—well, well, well!"

"I am Paul, the outcast of Slippery Alley, the mission boy. You see, Marm Gregor, I went out into the world and hewed my way. I have not starved in the doing of it, and now I am here to see old friends. Where is Pop Gregor, where are Joe Smith, Pat Kelly, and Schmidt?—where are all the rest?"

"In Potter's Field—every one. I'm all that's left. Slippery Alley has a new lot but for old Marm Gregor. You—you back, kid? Why, it's amazin'!—but I am glad to see you, very glad. And you look brave and well, may the good Lord be praised!"

"I thank you, good mother. Now, I want to talk with you of old times."

"Come to my rooms, kid."

Ben followed her lead without hesitation; he knew the way well. Marm Gregor had a small, mean den, well up in the building. They reached the place and he sat down.

He looked about him with curiosity.

There he had passed a part of his childhood. He knew the room so well now that it was like having been gone only a day. The poverty and meanness were old to him, yet he looked around with some interest. The past came back with a rush.

The woman hurried around for a few minutes and then sat down.

"Deary!" she exclaimed, "I am full of curiosity to know how it all has been. You in such fine clothes—where did you get them?"

"Let us begin at the beginning, Marm Gregor. I am older than when I saw you last, and I have more than a child's curiosity to hear you speak of the past. What do you know of me?"

The miner leaned forward eagerly, surveying the wrinkled woman upon whom, unknown to herself, so much now seemed to depend.

"Why, don't I know a good deal?" she replied.

"My history—my history! Tell it to me!"

"From the beginning?"

"Yes."

"It begins early. You were in this house before you could talk."

"Begin then. Had I a mother?"

"Poor, dear lamb! I remember her well. You had a mother, and a good and loving one."

"Go on, go on! Make haste."

"Well do I recall when you came. Your mother brought you in her arms, and a fine babe you were, too. Why shouldn't you be, with such a mother? Oh! she was as sweet and good as they could be. She wasn't one of us, child. Who she was I know not."

"How did she differ from the rest?"

"Her clothes were better—at the start; they grew different later. But it wasn't that. We were rough and clumsy, and none too clean, I fear me. She was refined—just like a rich man's daughter."

"Rich? How do you know she was rich?"

"I said not that. Would she have come here if she had been rich? No, but if I was dying I'd swear she must have been rich once. She had all that way, so different from us."

"Go on!"

"Clearly, she was in hard luck. She was as poor as the rest of us, but she tried to support herself and you, and she was brave and full of energy. That was the way at first, but a change came. Her cheerfulness went out; she had met with deepest sorrow."

"What?"

"Your father's death."

"And then?"

"The poor, dear thing faded and died like a smitten plant."

Benjamin's face was tremulous for a moment; he remembered his mother well and revered that memory. Then he added:

"Who and what was my father?"

Far forward he leaned, painfully anxious for the reply. Marm Gregor shook her head slowly.

"It's little I can tell you, laddie. Your father I never saw, but I know from what she had told me that he was away seeking to establish himself in business somewhere. She, poor dear, was very hopeful all the while, but his death ended it all. Laddie, I wish I could tell you more, but I know nothing."

"You know their names?"

"Yes, Philip and Margery Anderson. You knew that before."

"Yes. But, Marm Gregor, did my mother never let fall anything of family matters?"

"Never."

"Not even where their home was?"

"No."

"Do you think they were New Yorkers?"

"I don't know. She didn't know anything about this section of the city; but why should she? Wherever she was born it was in an upper circle of life, not in the slums."

"Did she never speak of father, mother, or brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"That was queer."

"I don't think so. I believed then, and I believe now, that there had been some family trouble. Maybe somebody opposed their wedding, child. Anyhow, I always thought they were estranged from their relatives. I'm sorry, laddie, but I can give you no clew."

"It surely is much to be regretted. Now, one question more: Did you ever know or hear of a Mrs. Snow in connection with them?"

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER THE PIER.

Marm Gregor shook her head again.

"I never heard of her," she replied.

"There never was any Mrs. Snow in Slippery Alley, and I don't remember hearing the name in any way. No, I never heard of her."

Ben Richardson was disappointed. When he came to New York he had not intended to visit Slippery Alley, or pay any attention to those who had lived there in the past. Events had changed

that design, and he had hoped to learn of the mysterious Mrs. Snow, but the hope faded now.

He sat in silent meditation until Marm Gregor, surveying him curiously, again spoke.

"Your poor mother wasn't to blame for it, but she left you to a mournful lot for awhile."

The miner rose abruptly. The remark had stirred up old recollections strikingly.

"I was a waif of the city!" he exclaimed. "When she was gone I was too young to remember her or shift for myself. You cared for me for a time, but you were desperately poor, like all the others here, so I was sent to a mission."

"Only for a while, laddie."

"True, not that trip. When I was seven years old Nate Moses, the shoemaker, took me out to have an errand boy. I lived with you in this very room. Here I ate, slept, played, and thought—thought of the wretched life of the poor of a big city."

"It was a sorry childhood, but all in Slippery Alley have the same."

"The shoemaker died," pursued Ben, "and then I went to the mission again. I was there until I was eleven years old, and then there was another brief experience about the city, seeking a living."

"A hard life, laddie, a hard life!"

"It bore fruit. I lived miserably, and I saw how others lived. It was the same with young and old, and I determined to live in a different way. Of all places on earth, a city is the worst for the poor. Cities were made for the rich, not for the poor. I vowed not to submit to such a life of woe as others had."

"So that was why you went away so sudden?"

"It was. I went to the West, where every man was equal to his neighbors, and where there was room for all; where there was chance to breathe and to be one of the human family, not a rat hemmed up in squalid walls like those of Slippery Alley."

"Sure, sure, laddie, you have made your mark!"

"I've done fairly well, and I am a man, free, independent, and contented. But, Marm Gregor, I want to know who I am!"

Suddenly changing his manner he came close to her, with impetuous movements.

"I was early left an orphan; I was a mission boy. What else was I?" he demanded.

"I'd tell if I could, laddie."

"My mother died slowly. Did she leave no word?"

"No."

"Strange!"

"I think it was an accident. As you say, she died slowly—it was a fading away, but she was not yet bed-ridden when she died one night in her sleep. It is likely she did intend to speak of her past, for your sake, but she had no chance. Death took her too soon, and what she might have said was never said."

Ben sighed. He had a good deal of reverence for that mother who had been the nearest to him of all earthly persons, and it made him gloomy to think of her as living in Slippery Alley. It had been a harsh fate. What had driven her to it?

"I'm afraid, laddie," added Marm Gregor, "you will never know more about yourself."

"It's hard."

"It's the way of Slippery Alley."

"Wretched alley!"

"It is all of that. Misery and mystery abound here."

"And so you never knew a Mrs. Snow?"

"Never!"

"I seem to have come for nothing—and yet, no! You cared for me once, Marm Gregor, and as well as your slender means would allow, I am glad to see you once more, and, with your permis-

sion, I'll linger a bit. Maybe I can sweep up the floor for you, or some such trifle."

"The same old laddie!" exclaimed the woman.

"Just the same, Marm Gregor."

Ben lingered. He was not in a hurry to go. He was uneasy over the fact that Detective Irad Charleston had work that interested him, and Slippery Alley was an excellent haven of safety. He felt just like staying there until he had been allowed time to think the future over. As Marm Gregor was given to falling asleep at all times and places, and as she kindly did so on this occasion, he had the desired opportunity.

How great was his danger? Would Charleston solve his identity and arrest him? Would he then be convicted of murder?

Ought he to strike at Albert Charleston at once? Would it be best to hurry on his vengeance and then flee to the West? Or was the prudent way to wait until a better chance?

What was the history of his early life? His mother had seemed superior to the other denizens of Slippery Alley. Had she been of a rich family?

What about Mrs. Snow? She wanted a Paul Anderson who was heir to a great fortune. Who had she been? With whom had she been corresponding before her death? Where was this person now? Most of all, was the Paul Anderson who was an heir to much money the same Paul who was thinking it all over, or was there another of the same name?

A new thought came to the miner.

"One paper was found on the pier. Were there others? Why not? They may have been dropped on the pier and blown into a corner, or caught under boxes. I want to look that place over myself. There may be danger in it, but I believe I'll do it!"

The plan grew upon him, and he decided to act.

The day was well advanced when he so decided, and he had no time to lose. He parted from Marm Gregor and left the house and Slippery Alley. He had promised to see the old woman again, and she had showered words of good will upon him.

"I don't like this," he mused, as he moved away. "There is nobody else known to me who is likely to have knowledge of my past, and the whole business seems to be a fast-closed book. I don't even know who wrote Mrs. Snow about the fortune awaiting Paul Anderson, and, if I did, how should I go to work to get it? I'm able to support myself, and the loss of a fortune won't cause me to lose any sleep, but I would like to know who I am."

While thinking thus he was walking toward the pier. In due time he reached the vicinity, but paused before going out upon the over-water structure.

"I want to hunt here," he murmured, "but does a foe lurk in the background? There may be an officer or spotter on guard."

He watched, but saw no one, and, as twilight was approaching, he finally made a bold move and went upon his quest. His old source of trouble, the watchman, was not visible, and he hoped for the best.

Search for the possible papers was begun.

True to his plan, he looked in out-of-the-way places; boxes, barrels, and boards were moved to further his object, but no papers came to light.

"There's only one thing more," he remarked. "I'll go below the floor and see what the dock-filling rubbish will put in the contribution box."

With this he went back toward the dock line and clambered down the side of the pier.

A sort of raft was tied there to the spiles of the pier, just where he could make use of it.

The water was rippling somewhat strongly, and the raft bumped up against the supporting timbers. It was a dark and gloomy place, too, and he peered around with growing dissatisfaction.

"A fellow needs a lantern here," he muttered. "There might be a dozen papers, wills, letters, or board bills, lying here among the stones and rubbish of the dock, yet I be none the wiser."

But he made his search in a systematic way, hunting over the surface of the raft and carefully scanning the cracks of the flooring overhead, but nothing came of it.

He finally gave up with an air of disgust.

"Lost time!" he exclaimed. "With the tide going and coming as it does here, a paper would have no show, if on the water floating. Why, it would wash the sandals off a Chinese camp cook. I'll get out!"

He seized hold of the pier floor sills, and soon was out to the pier edge, to clamber up over the stringpiece.

As his head reached the level of the flooring something startling occurred, and if his fears were not exactly realized, he was shown that great peril menaced him.

CHAPTER IX.

A FIGHT IS FORCED.

The possibility that a policeman might be in wait for him had made Ben wary; so, as his head rose to the floor level, he caught sight of a human form crouched near the edge of the pier, and saw a hand clasping a raised club.

Down came the club with a thump, missing its aim, but hitting the stringpiece of the pier heavily.

The miner had deftly dodged the blow, and his ire was up.

"Oh, that's your style, is it?" he cried. "Guess I'll see you one better. Here's at you!"

With the agility of an acrobat he swung himself up and made a clutch at the man, who was ready for another blow. The arm was turned aside and no harm done.

"Now it's my turn!" exclaimed Ben, and he grasped his assailant by the neck. At once followed a cry for help.

"This way—this way! The fiend has got me!" bellowed the man.

Instantly the pier seemed to be alive with men. They leaped out from the cover of boxes and barrels, and all swarmed down upon the delegate from Shagbark Camp.

The Man from Montana was corralled, but he faced them all with unwavering front.

"So Al Charleston has sent you!" he cried. "Well, I'm here. Get into the game, for I am with you!"

Wresting the club from the first of the gang, he began to use it lustily. The first person to reach him received a blow that sent him down, and then the others had their share.

The miner was quick and strong, and the club seemed to become almost a wall of wood before him. It rose; it fell; it circled and thrust and described all sorts of angles, but it was never at rest, and no aimless strokes were made.

All the while his voice rose cheerfully.

"All together, now, boys! This way to view the untamed terror of the Black Butte Range! Walk up and get your drink at my expense! Come and view the brindled buck of the Big Butte Basin!"

While the club was so busy not one foe could penetrate his guard; all the while he kept out of their reach, and, though the odds were so much against him, he appeared to be the only member of the party that really enjoyed the fun.

The limit was reached at last. The assailants, making no headway, and literally knocked out, turned and fled in a body.

"That's right!" cried the Montana champion, "it's time for you to report to your boss. Just say to Al Charleston that the Big Butte Boomer is able to hoe his row with any purple-eyed puppy in this section. So-long!"

Ben laughed heartily as he surveyed the fleeing men, but suddenly a new cry sounded. The night watchman had been

aroused, and his call of alarm changed the miner's mood instantly.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Ben, "I've got to swing my insteps or the cops will lay hold of my carcass and land me in the coop!"

His fear of the law had not abated, though he could fight ordinary men and enjoy it. But now it was his turn to "git!" He made a rush for the street, and was soon hastening away from that particular spot.

Luck favored him, and nobody interfered with his escape, so he soon was where he began to feel easy. He slackened his pace.

"Well, that was a ruction!" he mused. "I was so near to the gibbet that I felt the touch of the rope. That confounded watchman would have had Irad Charleston there in a few minutes, I suspect, and I reckon there is no doubt that Irad was born to hang me. But I want to postpone that job as long as convenient."

He passed his hand over his face in a slow, peculiar way, and added aloud:

"Yes, and I want to square matters with Albert Charleston before I go to the gibbet!"

He told the truth, and he never had wanted to secure vengeance so much as then. He had absolutely no evidence to show who had instigated the late attack, but the idea that had flashed upon him in the moment of the affray had not wavered in the least—he believed Albert had done it all.

True, the men had all been typical toughs, but he was confident they had been hired by the detective's son.

"He has carried this too far!" declared the miner. "I let up on him out of generosity—or, well, because his father scared me, maybe—but this won't do. I'll see Al early in the morning, and we will fight it out. There must be a duel; I must hurry up and wipe him out. I carry a scar that he gave me at Shagbark, and he shall carry a scar that won't heal."

The Montana man was plodding along with his head lowered. He had forgotten his late enemies to a certain degree, and had no thought of further trouble, but he did not know the ways of the city thug.

His quiet was rudely broken in upon. One moment he had the street all to himself, as he thought; the next men leaped out from an alley and he was attacked with savage impetuosity.

Blows were rained upon him, and he staggered back from the storm with every sign of sore defeat.

This time he had no club, and the men gave him no time to do anything in self-defense. He was driven to the wall of the nearest building, and there they proceeded to swarm upon him, never ceasing the shower of blows.

He would not have been so slow to respond had not one of the first strokes injured him so much as to numb his powers, but he was weak and little like himself.

It was at this moment, when everything looked especially dark for him, that there was a change in the situation. A peculiar whistling sound broke in upon the struggle, and the men who were fighting the miner seemed to feel the sting of many scorpions.

Startled, they looked to see what was the trouble, and they soon learned. A carriage had stopped by the curbstone, and its occupant was plying a whip with vim. Through the air swept the lash, and at each stroke the weapon left its mark.

Swish, swish, swish!—zip, zip, zip! sung the lash, and the faces of the assailed men received the full benefit of every blow.

Now, the strangers were not weaklings, and they would have known how to deal with the newcomer had it not been for one strange thing.

The wielder of the whip was a woman! Erect she stood in the vehicle, and with remarkable strength and swiftness she plied the lash. It stung, it cut the skin of the victims, and, as they saw

who was belaboring them, they were too much astonished and dazed to have full use of their wits.

Dumfounded, they endured meekly, albeit wrathfully, until one of the party set an example by turning and fleeing with the speed of a thoroughly scared man.

"The police will have us!" he cried.

Possibly the exclamation was misunderstood—maybe they thought it was an announcement that police were coming already—but, be that as it was, the result was seen at once.

Every one of them fled after the first fugitive, and the street was thus cleared.

Benjamin Richardson rubbed his eyes blankly. His head was getting into shape, and as he saw what the situation was he gazed with astonishment. The young woman had resumed her seat, but she did not move on.

"Are you badly hurt?" she asked in a businesslike way.

"Bless me, no!" answered Ben. "You didn't hit me!"

"Who said I did. The men hit you."

"Oh! I'm used to that."

"Did you like it?"

"No."

"Then you are not sorry that I interfered?"

"Well, I should say not."

"They were robbers, I suppose?"

"They didn't stop to explain."

"I considered it too one-sided to be right."

"I reckon they thought the same thing when you came in. You and your whip made the odds about ten to one in your favor. Thunder! but how you did belabor them!"

"You didn't!"

"Zounds! but you're right. I'm not a tender chick, but they did have me knocked out when you came. I'm sorry—I'm ashamed."

"Nonsense! They were three to one."

"And you were one to three, but you won the trick in a gallop. Say, miss, are you from the West?"

"No."

"Then the East produces some mighty good stock. Jehu! how you did hit them! Miss, allow a devoted slave to ask who you are."

CHAPTER X.

THE OWNER OF THE WHIP.

The rescuer quietly placed her whip in the socket.

"My identity is not of value," she replied, composedly. "Are you sure you can care for yourself now? Are you fully over your hard usage at their hands?"

Ben Richardson was quick to seize a point. He saw one now. The lady was ready to go if he was able to care for himself, and if he admitted that he was in a condition to justify it she would drive on. He did not want this to occur. He saw that she was young and pretty, and her glorious courage had won his admiration and his heart. The double-faced scamp pretended to feel weakness and leaned against the adjacent lamp-post.

"How does a person feel who is about to faint?" he asked, huskily.

"I don't know; I never fainted."

"I'll bet a dollar on that!" declared Ben, fervently.

"Are you faint?"

"My head is at least as heavy as usual."

"Is it steady?"

"It swims strangely. I see singular sights. Beautiful visions float before my eyes."

"You are seriously injured!" she exclaimed, her businesslike manner giving place to one of sympathy.

"I fear so," agreed deceitful Ben.

"Let me go and summon a policeman."

"I fear to be left alone. Would—would there be room in the carriage for me?"

"I think not. You are a stranger—I think there is no room. We will wait for a policeman."

"You are very kind, Miss—I think I didn't catch your name."

"Probably not."

"Possibly you would let me follow your carriage if your home is near."

"It is not near, so that possibility need not be discussed."

Benjamin was trying his best to learn who she was and where she lived, but his ill luck was so marked that he tried to think of a new device, and rubbed his head to stir up his ideas.

"You are still faint!" she exclaimed.

"Desperately!"

"I see no policeman."

"Don't look. I see too much myself. Many colors float before my glazing eyes. I see red!"—he looked at her hat—"and black and white"—he dropped his gaze to her dress—"and then," looking at her cheeks, "there are roses, roses, roses—rich, red roses, glorious roses, sweet roses!"

"This is the talk of delirium," declared the girl, her manner still sympathetic, but businesslike. "I will see that you are sent to a hospital. More, your assailants must be arrested, and, as soon as you are able, you must appear in court against them."

"Not for the world!" cried Benjamin, thinking of his need of keeping clear of the law.

"Why not?"

"They were only joking—that is, I mean I was only joking. Of course, I shall hunt them down. I shall need you for a witness, you know. Your address is—"

"If I see by the newspapers that they are arrested I will appear to testify. You will not need to send for me."

"It will be no trouble. If I had your address I could—"

"I will ride to the end of the block and summon the first policeman I see. He will take care of you."

"Just what I am afraid of."

"Indeed!"

"I mean," returned Benjamin, "that New Yorkers seem very hard-hearted, and I might not be safe with him."

"The police force, sir, are very estimable men. You will be well cared for by one of the force. Here is one coming now. I will call—"

"Never mind, never mind!"

"But your dizziness—"

"Is all gone!" declared deceitful Ben.

"And the strange things you saw—"

"Were charming!"

"In any case, you are safe now. Here is the policeman. Good-night, sir!"

She touched her horse with the whip and went off at an easy trot.

The man from Shagbark stood looking after her thoughtfully. He had played his best cards and lost. She was going out of sight, and he had not the slightest idea who she was or where she lived.

"Beautiful vision!" he murmured. "Model of feminine loveliness. Extract of sweetness and grace. Bold as a warrior and gentle as a dove! She goes, and I never shall see her again. She fades away, and I see sights now not half so pleasant as when she was here. There is gloom before my eyes, but I think the chief trouble is with my heart!"

The steps of the advancing patrolman aroused him, and as he saw the grim guardian of the peace advancing he was seized with a sudden desire to get home.

He went, followed by the curious gaze of the officer, but unchallenged and unmolested.

In due time he reached his hotel. He had thought of the charming unknown all the way, and he kept it up, but finally his thoughts turned to sterner subjects.

"I owe this double attack to Albert Charleston," he exclaimed. "I know that. Who else would do it? That fellow has set his gang upon me—one of the typical city gangs that smell rank to the high skies. Out West each man can fight his own battle—here it's a gang that does the job. Say, that's manly—that is!"

Deep was his disgust, and it served to make him more than ever bitter against Albert Charleston.

"I'll see him again in the morning," he declared, "and then I'll make the fellow fight. I won't shoot him from behind, as he did me, but his chance shall be equal to mine. A duel, free and fair—that shall be it, but it must be fought soon. I shall see him in the morning. Yes, and he shall fight!"

The miner went to bed and quickly fell asleep. He had seen too much of wild life in the West to let anything disturb him now, and his nerves were unshaken alike by the past adventures and the prospect of more.

The following morning he was up early and giving diligent attention to breakfast. This done, he smoked and mused.

"When I get all business off my hands," he thought, "I'll look for that beauty who whipped my foes into submission. I don't suppose I shall ever see her again, but I would give a gold mine to meet her and know her. I reckon—well, yes, it is more than likely that I am in love with her."

Conscientiously he studied the point, and then added:

"I know I am. Case of love, sure. I'll hunt for her, but, first, I must shoot Albert Charleston!"

Going to his room he put his revolver in immaculate condition and then left the hotel.

Straight to the Charleston house he went, and, once there, he had good luck. When the servant opened the door he saw Albert in the hall.

"Just the man I wanted to see!" Ben exclaimed.

Albert surveyed him in frowning silence.

"I have business," added Benjamin.

He had walked in, and, as there did not seem to be any other way, young Charleston submitted, but with ill grace.

"Come in here," he replied, indicating the parlor.

They entered, but Albert remained standing and looked coldly at the caller.

"Now, then," began Ben, briskly, "let's settle our little affair."

"I have no affair to settle," curtly replied Albert.

"Our duel, you know."

"I shall fight no duel."

"Then how the dickens are we to do it?"

"I can't answer for you, sir. As for myself, I shall mind my own business."

"Oh! but see here!—you shot me out in Shagbark Camp, and it must be accounted for now."

"I tell you again that I never was in Shagbark Camp."

"Oh! come down from that perch!"

"Mr. Richardson, I have had enough of this sort of thing. I know absolutely nothing of the things you refer to. If you are sincere in a part of it, you are mistaken in the rest. I never was in Montana in my life. I never saw you or heard of you until you came here."

"I see I shall have to put the screws on," exclaimed Benjamin, his even voice growing threatening. "I am tired of denials that are false to the backbone. Now, you must fight. Shall it be a square duel? Say yes, and be done with it. Where shall we meet?"

"I decline to meet you anywhere!" declared Albert.

"Then, by George! you and I will have a row. You shot me, and I will have revenge. You shall fight me or die!"

Ben stopped short and stood staring blankly. The door had suddenly opened, and on the threshold stood the beautiful unknown of his previous night's adventure.

CHAPTER XI.

A REMARKABLE MEETING.

The Montant Miner was rattled. Cool he could be in the hour of danger, but this was quite a different situation. One moment he had been threatening Albert and pressing his errand of vengeance; the next the door had opened to admit beauty, amazement, and confusion.

His beautiful rescuer—the fair girl he

never had expected to see again—she stood there in all her loveliness.

She was not alone. A young man was close beside her, but Ben Richardson did not notice that—he saw her only.

If it had depended upon Ben, the pause might have been a long one, but the girl was not confused. She did not bestow more than one glance upon him, and that gave no sign of recognition, and then she drew back a step.

"Excuse me," she requested. "I did not know anybody was here."

She was going to retreat further, but Ben rallied and made a desperate effort to prevent such a step.

"Hold on a bit!" he exclaimed. "There is no haste; this is not a private interview. Al and I were only—only—well, you see we were talking of a horse race. Small affair!—don't go!"

His tone was almost beseeching, and his rapid utterance drew the attention of all to him.

The young lady looked, and surprise became imprinted on her face.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "you—"

She stopped short, but Ben came in quickly.

"Yes, yes!" he cried, "I am the one."

"I think I have seen you before."

"You have!—you have!" declared the miner, in delight.

"Are you the groom at the stable?"

Ben's face fell. If it had been an intentionally unkind speech he might have endured it, but it was so plainly sincere that he was staggered. Not only did she fail to recognize him, but he was associated in her mind with the hostler.

As he stood with downcast expression, a sudden change on her part was followed by the flushing of her cheeks, and then she quickly added:

"I beg your pardon, sir! I know you now; I remember. I trust you will not think I spoke intentionally—"

"Not at all, not at all!" heartily cried Ben, his face beaming. "I can understand it, and I am glad to see you again. I suppose you are visiting Albert Charleston. He is an old friend of mine; we met out in Montana, and we had some rare old times together. Eh, Al? And so you are visiting Al? Well, well!"

"I am Albert's sister."

"The dickens you are!"

"Didn't you know that before?"

"No."

"I am Lezel Charleston. Brother Albert, why don't you introduce us all around?"

"His sister!"

Benjamin muttered the words stupidly. If she had been anybody else, or, indeed, if Albert had possessed a dozen sisters, it would not have influenced Ben, but with this fair young woman in the case it was very different.

Confused thoughts went through the miner's mind.

"This angel his sister! Why, I've fallen in love with her, and now—if she's his sister, how do I stand? Can I kill her brother? Say, I'm in a muddle of the worst sort!"

Albert had been watching and listening sulkily. He now muttered:

"This is one Benjamin Richardson. These are Miss Lezel Charleston and Dean Palmer."

"Glad to see you, by George!" exclaimed Ben, warmly. "I didn't think of meeting anybody here but my old friend Al. You see, Al and I were together out in Montana. Old mining partners, and all that. Had piles of fun, didn't we, Al?"

"You say so."

Albert was curt. He was fully awake to the fact that Ben intended to press his vendetta, and he was not in mood to follow the drift of the miner's changing notions.

"I am sure I am glad to meet an old associate of my brother," replied Lezel. "I have often asked Albert about his Western trip, but he has not been a good narrator. Maybe you can tell me more of what happened to you both out there?"

"You bet I can, and you bet I will!"

cried Ben. "Just sit down and I will spin you yarns that will make your hair kink, if I may so express it. I had rather see you in private—"

He paused, and, for the first time, looked squarely at Mr. Dean Palmer. That gentleman smiled, bowed, and remarked:

"I will retire if a private interview is desired."

"There is!" eagerly declared Ben.

Miss Lezel frowned prettily.

"I know of no reason for a private interview," she observed. "It seems that the gentleman spoke hastily. Of course, there is no cause for anything in private. We will all sit down here—unless Albert considers that Mr. Palmer and myself are intruders."

She glanced curiously at her brother's dark face, but Albert was aroused from his gloom by the reminder, and he readily replied:

"Not at all, sister. This visit of Mr. Richardson's is only a—"

He hesitated, and Ben finished for him:

"A friendly call—nothing more."

"Then we will not run off."

Ben rubbed his chin hard. In his joy at meeting his charmer again he had almost forgotten that he was allotted by fate to kill her brother, and he would have been perfectly happy had it not been for Dean Palmer.

That person worried him. Dean was young, good-looking, and stylish, and he and Lezel had a way as if they were quite friendly. That was not as the man from Shagbark would have had it.

A general conversation followed, but it was not a success. Lezel and Palmer had to do most of the talking. Albert was moody, and with such profound admiration for the girl, there was only one way Ben could talk, and he could not talk that way when others were present.

Thus matters dragged in spite of the girl's temporary vivacity, and she was wise enough not to make the interview too long. After a few minutes she rose to go, and Palmer went with her. She was of a hospitable nature, and her brother's friends had strong claim upon her, but when she looked at Albert's gloomy face she knew something was wrong, and she did not extend the usual polite expressions to Ben when she went out.

The miner was downhearted for a moment, but his spirits were too buoyant to long remain under a cloud.

"Say, Al!" he exclaimed, "is she really your sister?"

"She is," frigidly answered Charleston. "What of it?"

"Why, I didn't suspect it."

"What do you know of her?" sharply demanded Albert.

"Oh! it was she that—"

"That what?"

"Didn't she tell you?"

"No."

"Then I will, for, by George! she is a heroine. It was like this," and Ben told of his adventure in the street, and how Lezel had used her whip to such good advantage on the gang of assailants. He forgot that Albert was supposed to be the author of the attack, and just simply bubbled with enthusiasm over Lezel's pluck.

"It was like her," murmured Albert.

"She's true sand, old man!"

"It was curious it should happen so."

"So it was. I never supposed she was your sister. If I had known it I would—"

The miner paused and looked seriously troubled.

"I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed.

Albert did not ask what was meant, and there was silence until Ben himself spoke again.

"Say, old man, how am I going to kill you if you are her brother? She helped me in a bad fix, and I am as grateful as a dog. I don't see my way, but I know I ought to kill you. If I do that she will grieve, and—hang it all! how shall we fix it?"

"Suit yourself!" curtly responded Albert.

"You shot me; but, then, I lived through it."

Charleston was silent.

"Maybe you didn't know the gun was loaded. Eh?"

Albert shook his head.

"But, then, there's the money you stole from me. It looks bad."

"Suit yourself."

"Maybe you wanted to sort of make your mark in the West—tenderfeet do. Out our way a man who hasn't dropped his man isn't of much note. If—well, if you just did it to have the satisfaction of saying you had winged your man, maybe—maybe I can overlook it!"

Benjamin brightened up and leaned forward, anxious to effect a reconciliation. Albert remained silent for some seconds; then he curtly replied:

"It is time this nonsense was ended. I never was in Montana, and I never saw you until you came to this house. I know nothing of what you say. You needn't overlook anything. Go your way! Do what you please. I don't care a rap for you or your wishes or revenge!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MONTANA MAN GETS INTO TROUBLE.

The man from the Black Butte Hills looked hard at Albert Charleston, but said nothing for several seconds. He was perplexed and uncertain. He considered it rare magnanimity on his part to try to find an excuse for the man who had shot him, and the fact that Albert would not meet him was confusing and disturbing.

Presently he arose, and, twirling his hat awkwardly, muttered:

"I've got to think this over. It is odd, and I don't see it all clearly. Maybe I shall, by and by. I ought to shoot you, and I've come a good ways to do it. I'll think it over."

He moved toward the door, and then paused a moment on the threshold. Almost bashfully he added:

"Remember me to your sister!"

With this remarkable farewell he started again, and, as Albert did not check him, he was soon outside. He walked up the street with his forehead knit and his eyes bent on the sidewalk.

Vast conundrums were in the mind of the miner, and they worried and baffled him not a little.

He did not recover from his abstraction until he reached his hotel, and he might have kept up his brown study longer had he not found a note awaiting him there. He opened it and read:

"Ben Richardson: Will you kum to the abuv address and see me. I have moved, and I wood like to talk with you. Come soon. HICK RANSOM."

The miner had not forgotten his acquaintance of the street adventure, and this invitation came at a moment to impress him favorably. He wanted a change, and company of some sort. The more he thought over his own situation the more it perplexed him, and he was just as likely to go right in his personal affairs by going haphazard as any other way.

He decided to call on Hick Ransom.

"I'm not sure he is an honest man," mused Ben, "but he can help me to forget my own difficulties. Yes, and he has a vendetta to wage, too. That sort of draws us together."

Again the miner went out, and this time he moved off briskly. It was not a very long walk to the address given in the note, and when he arrived there he rung the bell buoyantly.

A slovenly servant soon appeared.

"Hick Ransom in?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to see him."

"Come up to his room."

All this was very simple, and Ben followed her up the stairs. To the second floor they went, and the girl showed a door open.

"Go in!" she directed.

Promptly Ben obeyed, but first sight of the room caused him to pause. Three

men were present, and none of them was Hick.

"Hallo!" the Montana man exclaimed, "I reckon I've made a mistake."

"Do you want to see Ransom?" asked one of the party.

"Yes."

"Then you are all right. Sit down! Hick will be here directly."

It was a cordial invitation, and Ben complied without delay.

"So you are friends of Hick's?" he asked.

"Very warm friends," was the response.

"I didn't know he had friends in New York."

"I've just come down from his home."

Ben looked at the speaker in some surprise. The latter was a stylish young man, and certainly appeared to be a city man.

"How is Hick getting on?" the miner continued.

"I may say he is doing very well. I couldn't wish to see him better situated."

The spokesman answered very naturally, but Ben noticed that the other two men smiled in a peculiar way. The Western man did not like that smile; he began to dislike the crowd, too.

"Hick has not told us what you have done to help him," added the swell spokesman.

"Hasn't he?"

"No. What do you think of the situation?"

"Well, it's tolerable, I reckon."

"Do you think he is right in locating the men?"

"I shall have to let you take Hick's word for that," replied Ben.

"We have his opinion. Do you believe his theories correct?"

"To be frank, gentlemen, I don't know a blamed thing about him or his theories."

"Oh! come off! Of course you are in Hick's confidence. He told us that much."

"Gents," coolly answered the man from Shagbark, "that settles one thing in my mind. You are playing a game on me. This is no square deal, and I don't believe Hick Ransom is under this roof!"

"What makes you think that?"

"You are trying to pump me for some reason, and you wouldn't do that if Hick was in the deal. What's your game?"

The swell stranger leaned forward, coolly, and replied in a most matter-of-fact way.

"To be frank, you are correct."

"What more?"

"You are one of Hick's chums. Hick has been making himself disagreeable to us, and we have put him out of the way. Having done this we must serve his allies the same dish of fish, or they will make a row over it."

"Well, that's cool!"

"I am a frank man."

"I should say so, by George! See here! What have I to do with Hick Ransom?"

"You are his ally."

"So is your great grandmother! You've got a nerve like a Montana mountain. I've nothing to do with Hick Ransom or you, and if you've spread your wings all you want to, I'm off."

The miner rose as he spoke, but his chief enemy did not seem disturbed in the least.

"Well, good-day!" he replied, nonchalantly.

Ben looked hard at the fellow, perplexed by his utter unconcern, but he understood it more fully when he tried the door.

It was locked.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "you have locked me in!"

"Certainly; you are trapped. Intimacy with Hick Ransom has got you into trouble. If you had not come to New York to help him you wouldn't be in this muss."

"I didn't come to help him, and I have done nothing of the sort!"

"Bosh! We have seen you with him."

"Chance, no more."

"A little too thin. Don't stick to it."

Benjamin was angry all the way through, and he wanted to go over and take the cool swell by the throat and prove it. The fellow irritated him a good deal.

"Open this door!" commanded the miner.

"We shall not."

"Then I will burst it open!"

"If that is the way you feel we may as well proceed to business. Men, to action!"

The three moved in concert and advanced upon Ben. He saw danger in this, and his voice rung out, sharply.

"Halt, there!"

"Nab him!" the leader ordered.

Their advance was not checked, and the miner knew he had got to show his teeth. With the rapidity born of long practice, he whipped out a pair of revolvers and presented them with hammers up.

"If you fellows come nearer to me I will bore holes clean through you!" he cried, steadily.

With this he set his back to the wall and seemed to have the command of the situation. He certainly made an impression, for the gang halted as one man.

Evidently they did not like the looks of the weapons, but the leader soon found speech.

"Come, now, don't be foolish," he advised.

"Ditto, you! If you come on you will get your fill of lead."

"Do you know what a jury would say of that?"

"I know what a jury would say in my section, and if we were there I would have you swapping stories with Judge Lynch in about five minutes. Confound you! don't you think you can work off any stale city racket on me. I was born in this burgh, if I do wear other clothes now, and I know your way. Do you guess mine? It's shoot when there is need. Is it unlock the door or fight?"

Coolly the Man from Montana spoke, and the odds against him cut no figure. He was perfectly willing to meet the three and have a settlement in full.

"You won't be so foolish," remonstrated the leader.

"You have heard my cluck. Now, let's drop words. Do we fight? If so, come on! Advance! I am ready to shoot!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CREAKING BOARD.

The Montana Miner was cool and defiant, and it was so plainly to be seen that the gang did not care to risk their lives before the muzzle of his revolvers that it looked for a time as if he was to carry his point, and hold them all at bay, but he was shown that they had means of fighting him that were effective, if not heroic.

As he stood there with everything looking in his favor there came a surprise as disagreeable as it was sudden.

Something dropped over his head and arms, and the revolvers sunk enough to destroy his aim.

It was the moment for action with his enemies, and they fully improved it. They leaped forward, and, a moment later, Ben found himself struggling with the whole party.

Back of Ben was a window which, it seemed, gave a measure of light to an adjoining room—a sort of hole in the wall. Somebody had opened this cautiously, and then dropped a blanket down over the miner's head, thus crippling his resources and blinding him.

The device had done all that was hoped for from it, and the Boomer from Big Butte was out of the race.

He took his downfall with his usual tranquility, and, bestowing a glance upon the ropes that had been adjusted to his wrists, next turned squarely around and looked at the hole in the wall.

"Well, that's great!" he exclaimed.

"Not bad, was it?" returned the leader of the gang.

"Is that the way you fight?"

"Seems to be."

"Brave, isn't it?"

"It worked well."

"You were three to one, not counting the skunk that dropped the dry-goods over my head, yet you had to resort to a cowardly trick to deal with me. That's heroic, by George!"

"Success is the test of all things."

"Decency counts for something out my way."

"Take it easy!"

"Oh! don't you worry about me. I can stand this as well as you. This trick is yours, but there are more cards to play."

"Not for you!"

The leader had regained his cool unconcern, and he evinced a disposition to bother no more with the prisoner. He looked at his watch.

"Considerable time yet before we can do anything, boys," he remarked. "You will have to tie him up and put him into the next room. Go ahead with it, at once."

Without more ado Ben was gagged, and then he was marched to an adjoining room. Here his feet were tied, and he was cast upon a sofa in a perfectly helpless condition.

His enemies left him alone.

The room was large and duly furnished, but that was about all Ben could make out at first, the lowered shades shutting out the light of day to a considerable extent.

The prisoner lay very quiet and meditated.

"Old man, you have got into the worst sort of a fix. You have been trapped in a way that must make you sick. If you had been gifted with horse-sense you wouldn't have walked into this mess so blindly; but then, what can be expected from a weak-minded fellow like you?"

"Of course, this was to be expected. I've given Albert Charleston too much rope, and now he has nabbed me. I must say he has done it well. Yes, this is his work!"

Ben began to get accustomed to the imperfect light, and then he made out more and more of things in the room. This led to a surprise.

Looking toward the bed that stood in one corner he discovered a human face just above the spread.

For a moment Benjamin winked rapidly in his astonishment; then he proceeded to make out more.

"Well, I'll be jinged if there isn't a man on the bed! He seems to be tied up just like me, and just as helpless. Now, this is interesting. Another prisoner! Wonder who he is? I would ask him if I could, but this gag shuts off all chance of talk, and I reckon he is in the same lamentable fix."

A stray current of air moved the window shade a trifle, letting in more light, then Ben's face lighted up.

"Hick Ransom, by George!"

He would have exclaimed thus if the gag had allowed him, but he had to be content with thinking it.

The discovery was not so very surprising after all, but it had much of mystery about it. Why was Hick there, and what was the meaning of the double captivity?

Hick was conscious, and he and Ben lay there and looked at each other, but unable to speak.

He was so anxious to speak that he tried it, but nothing resulted except a gurgle in his throat that told nothing. Hick shook his head a little and looked just as wretched as his ally.

In this way minutes passed on and lengthened into hours. The room grew darker, and it was plain that night was falling.

From the enemy nothing was heard. Utter silence reigned, as far as Ben could discover, and the house might have been deserted as far as signs went.

Night fell fully, and there lay the captives with total blackness around them.

"But it won't last," thought the miner.

"We haven't been bottled up just for our beauty, nor to be eat as sauce on table

meats. The gang have some definite plan in view, and when it comes forth to light, Hick and I are going to get it right in the neck. What will it be? My theory is that they will take us to the East River and drop us into the drink, tied up as we are. That will give the fishes food for some time to come, though their proceedings will interest us no more."

Despite the peculiar way in which he reasoned it out the miner was fully in earnest, and he believed that his life was in peril.

It was while he was engaged in these thoughts that he heard a stir from near the bed.

"Somebody is here!" he thought.

The idea came to him that one of the gang had re-entered the room, and he concluded that the hour of destruction was at hand.

A board creaked ever so little under a heavy foot, and then he heard steps approaching. He could see nothing. Nearer came the unknown, and Ben would have spoken and remarked that he was ready for slaughter had it not been for the gag.

Closer yet moved the person, and then a hand touched the miner.

There was a gurgle in Ben's throat as he tried to say that he was ready. A hand touched his shoulder. He was shaken slightly. Then a voice whispered softly:

"Don't make a sound."

"I won't!" thought Ben, grimly.

"I am going to release you," proceeded the person, "You know me, don't you?"

The Montana Man did not, but he couldn't say so.

"I am Hick Ransom!" continued the speaker. "I've got loose!"

There was a sudden change in Ben's circulation. He had not dreamed of this. He had been so tightly bound himself, that it never had occurred to him that his associate could get free. If Hick was really there it was not only remarkable, but promising of something better.

"I'm going to free you," added the voice.

Then hands fumbled at Ben's bonds, and one by one they were untied. They fell away, and again the miner had use of his limbs. He reached up and tore away the gag. He rose to a sitting position.

"Thunder!" he mumbled between his stiffened jaws. "Is it really you, old man?"

"It's me," replied Hick. "Be you still alive?"

"Well, I'm not much less than that. Sprightly as a spring colt, by George! Say, how is this, anyhow?"

"It's just like this. I kept twistin' at them ropes until I got them loose, an' then I flung them off."

"Sounds easy as mice. I couldn't do it, though."

"We are free now."

"Well, say, what's the situation here, anyhow?"

"Them fellers who took us prisoners are still in the other room, I s'pose, an' they are ugly."

"What's their game?"

"I don't know it exactly, but they intend to kill us, of course."

"That's the way I figured it out. Al Charleston is bound to fix me yet."

"I never saw him with them this time, but they have a big spite against me, and you will suffer with me. They mean to kill us both!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW FOE APPEARS.

The Montana Man was recovering his full powers, and with the new condition of affairs came all of his old energy.

"Mean to kill us, do they!" he echoed. "Well, we've got a word to say about that. Let them try it and they will find it their busy night. Have you any weapons?"

"No."

"Same here. They took all my professional tools away. Seems we are bare-handed, but shall we surrender tamely?"

Well, I guess not! Old man, we will give them a scare before we are done."

"We want to run," replied Hick.

"Frankly, I feel that way, myself. Fighting is all right when there is politeness on both sides, but we can't swap lead without any weapons. Suppose we try a quiet retreat."

With this the miner moved toward the door which led to the hall. He expected to find it locked, and he was not wrong.

"Retreat is cut off that way. Now, let us look into the next room."

"But they are there."

"I reckon they are. We will see."

Ben moved forward to reconnoiter. Hick was not the bold man he had been when free, and he looked upon the move with grave doubts, which he proceeded to express, but the delegate from Shagbark was not to be checked. His courage was as good as ever.

He went to the connecting door. It was closed, but not locked, and he proceeded to go further. Cautiously opening the door a trifle, he secured prompt and ample view of the adjacent room.

It was well lighted, and several persons were present. The first to come into view was the swell-looking man who had led the gang, and as Hick saw him he touched Ben's arm.

"The dude is Willis Larimore," he whispered.

"So that's his name?"

"He calls himself that."

"They talk. Let's listen."

Thus far Ben had seen only the men who had entrapped him, but, at this juncture, a voice sounded that was not theirs.

"We can't dally about this. There must be decisive action."

Ben started. The speaker was a woman. He shoved the door open a trifle more, and then he saw her, too. A woman, sure enough, and young, handsome and brilliant. With all these qualities she did not look out of place with the gang, for she had the same marks that distinguished Willis Larimore as a man about town.

Birds of a feather had surely flocked together.

Hick shrunk further back, and his disturbed frame of mind was so evident that Ben asked:

"Who is she?"

"Kelma Downing."

"Well, what is she?"

"An ally of the men."

This told but little, but the miner dropped the subject, and gave his attention to the conversation in the next room.

"Don't you worry but we will carry this off all right," Larimore was saying.

"And don't you be too confident!" sharply directed the woman. "It is a case that needs action. The men in the next room are dangerous."

"They won't be long."

"Are you going to dispose of them?"

"No. Only shut them up."

"Suppose they get free?"

"They will not!" declared Larimore.

"One of them would not need this care if I had not missed my aim the other night," observed Kelma.

"You are a great revolver shot!" mocked Larimore.

"Remember the circumstances. Old Hick Ransom had met with Albert Charleston and was fighting him. I came along in my carriage. I saw the chance to dispose of Hick, and I tried to do it."

"And merely hit the house!" laughed Larimore.

"Be still, sir! I can shoot as well as you!" flashed Kelma, angrily. "They were fighting, I repeat, and I had to fire while they were swaying back and forth. Is it odd that I missed? Not at all."

Benjamin understood the shooting affair in part then.

"Never mind that," pacifically responded Larimore. "We have Hick now—yes, and the other fellow."

"Who is he?" demanded Kelma.

"You asked me that before, and I told you I did not know."

"You said he had come down with Hick from Herkimer county. That does not look reasonable to me."

"Why not?"

"He does not look like a countryman."

"Surely, he is not a city person."

"No, he is not of city life. What is he? He looks like a gladiator to me—an old-time gladiator of Rome. He is a magnificent animal."

"Oh! come, now, don't go on that way!"

"I like the fellow's style. Big, brawny, handsome, strong of face and cool of manner—that's my idea of model manhood, and he fills the bill!"

"Great Scott! if you haven't fallen in love with him!"

"I have said nothing of the sort."

"You've said it plainly, but let that pass. If any of us had a claim on you we should not need to be jealous of this second prisoner of ours. We shall have him under lock and key for the next few generations, you see."

"Maybe!" thought Benjamin, grimly.

"I shall not interfere, even if he is a fine animal," replied Kelma. "Deal with him as you choose."

"He made a mistake when he joined forces with Hick Ransom. That fool is easy to handle—"

"He attacked Albert Charleston boldly."

"Oh! Hick is bold enough. Perhaps we did wrong ever to antagonize him, but who was to know he would make himself so disagreeable? He must have Charleston scared blue."

"Charleston has not proved the good thing we thought him."

"He probably thinks the same of us. We have him by the neck, and New York will ring with the news if the story of this affair comes out. Old man Charleston will just about collapse if he knows his son as he is. It was a bad day for Albert when he met you, Kelma."

"Ha, ha!"

Kelma tossed her head as she laughed in answer, and seemed well pleased with the last intimation.

Benjamin drew Hick back and closed the door.

"Say, old man," he whispered, "are you some on the fight?"

"Yes, when I have a chance."

"Isn't there one now?"

"We have no weapons."

"Did you happen to notice what was on the table in their room? My revolvers lie there as sweet as you please."

"Within reach?"

"Only by making a dash for them."

"Can you do it?"

"I can try, and I am going to. The question is, are you ready to back me up?"

"To the death!" exclaimed Hick.

"I take it that we have persons opposed to us who are no chickens, and that they will make a row over it when we appear."

"You bet your life they are no chickens!" earnestly answered the Herkimer county man. "I know them, and I tell ye ter look out. Larimore an' the woman wear good clothes, but they are criminals o' the darkest dye, an' they had just as lief kill us both as not—in fact, I guess they would rather like ter get the chance."

"I rather guess they won't get it. Now, come on. When I rush for the revolvers do you come too, and we will stand up side by side and give them their fill. Come!"

Back to the door went the miner. The conversation was still going on briskly.

"If we get too hard pressed we shall have to fall back on Albert Charleston for help," asserted Larimore. "He might refuse—"

"He dares not refuse!" cried Kelma.

"So I think."

"We have him by the hair, so to speak. We are in danger, but if we go down there will others go with us. How the world would reel on its pedestal if it knew Albert as he is. Ha, ha!"

"I believe, Kelma, you would rather like to brand him."

"So I would."

"Stifle that feeling! As long as we can keep things shady we want to let Albert alone, and we will keep them shady if we have to kill Hick and your mighty gladiator."

Just then there was a rush of somebody across the floor, and when the gang looked up they saw Benjamin standing before them with his revolvers once more in his grasp.

"Here," he cried, "is the gladiator. What do you want of him?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE MONTANA MAN SHOWS HIS METTLE.

The surprise was complete. The gang had not entertained a thought of trouble, and the Man from Montana had acted with such celerity as to give them no chance to oppose him.

Across the floor he had gone with long steps, and when once his hands were on the precious weapons he felt all of his confidence return.

Bringing the six-shooters to bear on them, he added, coolly:

"If you have dark designs on me, now is your time to carry them out. Draw, and let us settle it."

Like so many statues sat the gang, but Willis Larimore finally recovered his power of action. With consternation expressed on his face, he exclaimed:

"Destruction! What does this mean?"

"Shall I draw a chart to explain it?" asked Ben, mockingly.

"Who liberated these men?"

"Ourselves."

"Fools! didn't you tie them better than that?"

"They couldn't have tied us better—for ourselves."

"We've got all this to do over again—"

"Stop!" retorted Ben. "You can't do it over again. Understand?—you can't! You haven't the muscle or means!"

"Get at them, men!" ordered the leader. "Advance!"

"Once more, stop!" exclaimed Ben. "Do you see these revolvers? They are loaded, and they cover you. The man who comes this way will pay the penalty of his act. I am not a child, and you will get no child's play. This is a fair warning. Keep off!"

"Magnificent animal!" murmured Kelma.

"Fools! dolts! idiots!" the leader cried, "why didn't you tie them to stay?"

"Don't blame them," suggested Ben. "I don't."

"Now undo your work! Advance upon him!"

"Why don't you lead?" asked the miner.

"I didn't do the tying."

"Well, this is your hour of action. A leader always does his prettiest when there is a crisis. Lead them, Larimore!"

Plainly Larimore was not anxious. The two revolvers leveled and held so steadily looked dangerous, and he preferred to stay where he was. So did his men.

A quiet smile appeared on Ben's face as he saw what the situation was. In the Black Butte Hills men might have disregarded the odds and rushed upon the revolvers, but this party were not going to do so.

"Hick," coolly directed Benjamin, "open that door."

Ransom tried to do as directed.

"It's locked."

"Kick a hole through the panel!"

Hick looked at the members of the gang.

"I will, ef the key ain't handed over."

"What the dickens do you want of a key? Do as I tell you. Kick!"

This time the speaker was peremptory, and Ransom delayed no longer. He drew up his leg until his foot was as high as comfort would allow, and then he sent his heavy boot smashing against the door.

The panel was utterly shivered.

"Finish the job!" ordered Ben.

"Now, see here!" cried Larimore, "you

want to stop that sort of thing. I'll have the police in here."

"No you won't. You're as much afraid of them as you are of me."

"Afraid of you? By jove! If you didn't have the drop on me I'd show you! You can bully with two revolvers cocked and ready, but if we were man to man in this game I would show you!"

"Hick, come here!" commanded Ben.

The Herkimer county man came.

"Take those revolvers. Hold them well up, and keep a dead bead on. If anybody but Larimore stirs, shoot the man who stirs. Understand?"

Hick obeyed, and the miner marched straight toward Larimore.

"Now," he steadily spoke, "we are as you wished. Prove your pluck!"

Larimore hesitated and his eyes wavered, but he was not a coward. Imposing as Benjamin looked, the crook had the nerve necessary to meet the unusual situation.

"You shall have all you want, sir!" he exclaimed.

Straight toward each other they moved, and Ben was not long in putting matters on a business footing. He made one blow which was merely an opener, just to give Larimore all the chance in the world to feel that he had due warning.

Willis, himself, had taken lessons in boxing, and he believed himself something of an expert. He warded off the blow with success that raised his hopes high, and there was a confused succession of strokes and counter-strokes.

Ben was as cool as an iceberg, and presently his voice rung out sharply:

"Hick, attend to business! You are watching me, not your men. Don't you see they are edging up? Shoot them if they try any games. However, maybe I had better end this right now—so!"

He feinted skillfully, and then, when Larimore left an opening, sent out a sharp upper-cut that reached its mark and the crook tumbled over without one sign of a stagger to keep his feet.

He lay still for a moment, and then slowly began to pull himself up to his elbow.

"Take your time," suggested Ben. "I don't think you want to practice any more, and you may as well rest."

The gleam of something bright on the floor suddenly caught Ben's eye. He stooped and picked up a long brass key.

"I reckon," he pursued, "this must have fallen out of your pocket when you lay down. Is it of practical use? I'll see!"

He stepped to the door, fitted it to the lock and turned the bolt back. He threw the door open.

"Why, yes," he added, "I don't see but it is of some use."

Then he made a motion toward the door. Hick took the hint and passed to the hall, after having placed the revolvers in the hand their owner reached out for them.

Ben fixed his gaze upon the remaining members of the party more keenly, as if giving them warning, and then retreated himself.

The miner fell back slowly, and then passed out of sight. He did not expect to go tamely, but it seemed that the gang had seen enough of his way. He and Hick were permitted to go in peace, and, traversing the intervening distance, they were soon outside the house.

Benjamin closed the door after them.

"Well, by ginger! that was a good piece of work!" exclaimed Hick.

"What? Oh! you refer to our late experience, I dare say. It was all a joke with me: such a thing would not count in Shagbark. Say, who the dickens are these friends of yours?"

"They ain't no friends o' mine, by gum!"

"Who are they, just the same?"

"A tough gang."

"What's their business?"

"I don't know that they have any."

"Come, now, don't talk that way, or I shall have to call you down. You know them and their business. Of course they are not in the directory under the business they follow, but you know their gen-

tle ways. What is it? Counterfeiters, thieves, river-sharks, or green-goods?"

"Mister," replied Hick, "you've been a good friend to me, an' I like you, but I can't tell you about them."

"Square refusal, eh?"

"I'm afraid so."

"My dear sir, I understand that like a book. If they are in the mire you are in the mud."

"Eh?"

"You don't spare them because you love them, so it must be because you fear them."

"Oh! come, now, don't!"

"That's it, Hickman Ransom. Nature gave you a decently honest face—out in Shagbark you wouldn't be lynched the first day, unless you cut up rusty—but you have not kept close to the law. You have soiled your fingers hob-nobbing with that gang. It seems I have got into danger by just associating with you—Hullo! somebody is in trouble yonder. To his rescue!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRANGER IN THE SLUMS.

Not much escaped the Montana man's keen eyes, and this new object of interest received due attention. He had seen a man not far in advance who was staggering as if about to fall, and there was something in his manner that made the miner think it a case not of inebriation.

Followed by Hick Ransom, he moved forward to investigate. By the time they had reached the unknown he had sunk upon a stoop, and there he sat with his face buried in his hands.

"Hullo, what's the racket, old man?" cheerfully asked Ben.

"I've fallen among thieves," he managed to reply.

"And you've got a lick on the law, too, I take it. There's a red spot there that looks like an ugly bruise."

"They hit me."

"Who?"

"I don't know. Street thieves."

"How much did they sock it to you for?"

"Less than a pound—I mean, only a few dollars."

"You are a Britisher."

"I am, sir."

"Stranger in New York?"

"Almost."

"Then let me remark that this part of the city isn't so safe a place for promenading as Fifth Avenue would be. Down here there are ways of getting rid of money that don't leave the original possessor enough to buy tobacco with."

"I was not wholly ignorant of the fact when I came here. I have seen life in other large cities, and I know the dangers, too."

The stranger began to speak more firmly, and Ben saw that he was a man of brains, education and experience.

"Still, you took the risk, it seems."

"I did, for business reasons."

"Seems the thieves had business, also."

"They proved it. Friend, kindly give me your arm."

Ben obeyed, and the Englishman gained his feet.

"I shall be all right, presently," he added. "My head clears, and when it fully gets into shape I shall be safe. I have nothing more to tempt cupidity or dishonesty."

"Since you are a stranger in a strange land, let me say that if you need cash you can rely upon me."

"Nobly spoken, young sir, but I am not in such need. At my hotel I have plenty of money for all legitimate needs. I"—the speaker hesitated, then appeared to think it well to finish—"I am Edmund Gardner, a barrister of London."

"Your business takes you into queer fields here."

"We seem to be companions," reminded Mr. Gardner. "Now, if you go my way I will walk in your company. I believe there is no fear of my dizziness returning, but it is well to be on the safe side."

Benjamin was very favorably im-

pressed with his new acquaintance, and he was glad to give his help. Arm in arm they walked off, with Hick following.

"Is your home in this section?" asked the Englishman, presently.

"Some ten blocks off."

"Are you not afraid to be abroad here by night?—you must know the dangers of the neighborhood better than I did."

"I did know I took risks in coming here, but"—here Ben winked to Hick—"I have had a very pleasant time."

"These plague-spots of city life are an interesting study. 'Tis said that nature makes no mistakes. I wonder if nature would willingly shoulder the slums of any great city? The slums grow out of man's vice, fed by his naturally lazy, vicious tendencies. Degeneration is a moral plague that assails a weak part as consumption of the body does. Heredity is much talked of, and, surely, is a potent factor in degeneration, but is it not, with its slum-life, an effort of nature to cast off the dead and diseased branches of the tree of life?"

Edmund Gardner had stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, and these remarks were delivered with slow but earnest seriousness, punctuated with numerous gestures.

Hick Ransom stared in amazement, but Ben was less perplexed. He saw that Mr. Gardner had a hobby, and was not disposed to deprive him of it.

"You may be right, sir," he admitted.

"That is what brings me to the slums," added Gardner.

"To study life?"

"Life in the slums—not from idle curiosity, but in support of my theory."

"Isn't that queer business for a lawyer?"

"Yes, and no. See my hair! It is gray. I am no longer young; I have lived my most active part of life, and now I am indulging in other hobbies. Briefly, sir, I am preparing a book on my favorite subject, and that is why I am in America, and, more especially, in New York. I am here to study slum-life and degeneration. My book will present my theory that it is all an effort of nature to cast off the diseased branches of the tree of life."

"The denizens of the slums," replied Ben, dryly, "came near lopping off a different sort of a branch, to-night, if your appearance speaks truthfully."

"Well said, but I escaped alive."

"Shall you try again?"

"Assuredly!"

"Defiant of danger?"

"I shall stick to my purpose."

Ben nodded approvingly. He liked the picture of the man then. Edmund Gardner was not young, but he was stout, erect and manly, and his quiet firmness was what Benjamin liked to see.

Presently they reached the Bowery, and there Gardner paused. He lived at a good hotel further up-town, and was to take a car there, so he proceeded to thank Ben in due form, and then, after taking his address, hailed a car and proceeded on alone.

Hick Ransom waited until he was safely beyond hearing, and then broke forth explosively:

"Say, that feller is crazy!"

"Why do you think so?" Ben asked.

"Why, his talk."

"About what?"

"Land only knows what it was about. What was it? Disintegration?—Disin-dignation? What did he call it?"

"Degeneration?"

"That was it! Well, of course, he is crazy."

"Do you think the proof good?"

"It is certain. No sane man would talk like that. I can't recall just what he did say, but it was wild as Bedlam. Somethin' about the diseased tree of the trunk of life, an' all that. Why, he's a ravin' maniac!"

Benjamin caressed his mustache a moment before answering.

"Hickman," he then returned, "the views expressed by our new friend did not come from a diseased mind. I suspect they come from a very shrewd one."

"How so?"

"If he is sincere in what he said he is a man seeking to write up a big subject, but I suspect he may not have been sincere."

"No?"

"All that may have been a cover for his real purpose."

"An' what was that?"

"Give it up! I have no idea. The notion is pretty strong in my mind that he was talking for effect, and that a really practical purpose underlay it all."

"I think he was crazy!" stubbornly persisted Hick. "I never heard no such talk from a sane man."

"Don't you be deceived in Edmund Gardner. If you see him again, watch him. He's got a good, strong brain, and there's a purpose in his life. Don't forget that!"

"A man of mystery, eh?"

"Yes."

"Police spy?"

"Curiously enough, you have voiced the very idea that is in my own mind, but I am not sure of it. Gardner looks like just what he claimed to be—a prosperous English lawyer. I firmly believe he is an Englishman. Still, he may be here as a police spy."

"Thunder! then you an' me want ter look out fer him!" exclaimed the Herkimer county man.

"I feel that I shall see him again, and, if I do, I shall study him well. One word with you, Hick. Will you tell me more of Willis Larimore and his gang?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't."

"Am I right in thinking they deliberately trapped me to do me up on my own hook, as I may express it, or were they right in asserting that I had to be nabbed because I was your associate?"

"I firmly believe it was the last. They saw us together, an' wrongfully thought I had made you my ally. They jumped on-ter me, an' thought they must seize you, too, ter be safe."

"My theories said otherwise, but it don't matter. Look out for them—they will strike again. There's danger for us. Watch out!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A LOST LINK IS FOUND.

The following morning Benjamin took an account of stock, as he expressed it. He had been several days in New York, and he had found the man he had come to find. Albert Charleston was located: When the miner left Shagbark he had supposed his case would be quickly ended when he had advanced thus far, but he had found it otherwise.

Albert still lived; his vengeance was not satisfied.

Peculiar things had come to pass, and Ben did not understand what to do. His fancy for Lezel was strong, and he disliked to injure one who was her brother, but what was he to do?

He was almost inclined to give up his grudge against Albert if he would make any amends whatever, but Albert would not even apologize.

Then there was the case of Mrs. Snow, and the alleged fact that a certain Paul Anderson was heir to a fortune. For the fortune he had an independent contempt, but he did want to know who he was.

All of this he thought over, on that morning, but it was all so vague and unsatisfactory that he finally rose in disgust and passed out of the hotel.

He went a few blocks aimlessly, and was then brought to a halt by a cheerful voice that hailed him.

He looked around and saw Irad Charleston, the detective.

"Hallo!" greeted the latter, "how are you, Mr. Richardson?"

Ben was not pleased over the encounter, but he took it as coolly as he could under the circumstances.

"I'm flourishing," he responded.

"That's good. You haven't been around to the house, lately."

"I've been busy."

"So have I. That Snow case is giving me a good deal of worry."

"How do you come on?"

"I hope to get my man soon."

"Have you cornered him?"

"Not yet."

"Probably he has fled from the city."

"He is still here."

"How do you know?"

"He was down by the fatal pier again lately."

Benjamin looked troubled.

"That so?"

"Yes. The watchman reports that he was there. It seems, too, that the guilty man had another racket, this time with some men. Maybe he robbed them as he did Mrs. Snow, but of that there is no certainty. Anyhow, he was there—the watchman recognized him."

"Isn't that watchman a bit imaginative?"

"He says he is sure of his position. The guilty man has shaved off his full beard."

"Oh! has he?"

"Yes, and that helps me a good deal. But I have more news of him. He was a Western man, and right from Montana."

The miner experienced an unpleasant chill.

"How do you know that?"

"He said so himself—this Robert Kemp did. He was a talkative fellow, and used to tell what great mining districts were still unworked in Montana, as he claimed. If he had talked more or less it would have been better for us. He spoke of so many different places and towns that we—those who heard him—cannot now recall where he claimed to live."

"Then chance made him less of a fool than he really was," replied Ben, in disgust.

"Rather an uncomplimentary way of putting it. Mr. Richardson, you are from Montana. Did you never hear of a Robert Kemp there?"

"Never!" promptly declared Ben.

"Well, he lived there."

"What if it was a pretense on his part? Why not turn your attention to Arizona? Now I think of it, I believe there is a man named Kemp who owns a mine in Arizona. Yes, I am quite sure of it."

"Whereabouts?"

"Up north of Phoenix, somewhere—I should say in the Bradshaw Mountains."

"You don't know his address, do you?"

"No. Maybe you could reach him by way of Phoenix, but, of course, it would take some time."

"I don't think I will experiment on such a blind trail. I expect to have Kemp, himself, before long."

"Shall you arrest him?"

"Certainly."

"But you have no proof of his guilt."

"It is enough to satisfy me."

It did not satisfy Benjamin, and he was most miserable. He felt considerable awe of Irad Charleston, and did not doubt that he would ultimately succeed. All this was alarming to the man who was the victim of unjust suspicion.

"I have the case well in hand," added the detective. "It was like this: Kemp came on from the West and stopped at the Good Report Hotel. Mrs. Snow was there, too. She had money, and Kemp learned of it. He prepared to rob her."

"Chance favored him. When she left the hotel, that fatal night, he followed her to the pier. How he accomplished his purpose you already know."

"Immediately after, he went back to the Good Report. There he shaved off his full beard, changed his clothes and secretly left the house, thinking he could throw suspicion off his track."

"Before or after the crime on the pier he made friends with a gang that I am now shadowing. It is a lawless party led by one Willis Larimore, or a man so called. This party is made up of general crooks; I know their history well."

"Last night Kemp was with them. I traced him to the house, and, summoning assistance, raided the place. In some way news had reached the gang, and all had fled. I was just about half an hour too late. But for that I would now have Kemp in my hands."

The detective ceased, and he left a most disturbed listener. The miner was frightened to see how near he came to the truth, despite some natural errors by the way.

"If you know so much you must also know just how Kemp looks," Ben remarked, in a low voice.

"I do. He looks very much like you." "Does he?"

"Yes. The same size, build, color of hair and eyes, and so on. I am so well posted," added the detective, smiling, "that I am prepared to place my hand on his shoulder, thus"—Charleston touched Ben's shoulder—"and say to him: 'Yield! You are my prisoner!'"

The miner gave up all hope.

"Mr. Charleston," he exclaimed, "I surrender!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the detective. "I only hope that when I get the real Robert Kemp he will be as docile."

The hopes of the man from Big Butte had sunk to the lowest point, but they now took an upward flight. After all, it seemed, he was not yet run down.

"Another thing," added the detective. "I have some clew to the identity of Mrs. Snow. I think the name is bogus. I have learned that she used to live in New York, though she probably has not lived here in the last few years."

"Where did she live?"

"You will pardon me if I keep that secret for now. This much I do know. Some eighteen or twenty years ago a party arrived at a certain boarding-house in this city. She was one of them."

"And the others?"

"A man, his wife and child."

"What name?"

"I see no reason to keep it secret. The name was Anderson."

Irish Charleston was enjoying a respite from his arduous duties, and, believing he was with one to whom he could safely talk, he felt a sense of rest in speaking so frankly. Little did he imagine how much he was interesting the man from Shagbark.

"It surely is pleasant to know that you are getting back like this," answered Ben, with surprising calmness. "What more did you learn?"

"Well, away back at the time mentioned there came to that house a certain Philip Anderson, his wife Margery, an infant son of the name of Alaric Paul, or Paul Alaric—he was mentioned by both names; and a servant girl. Her name was Eunice Ray."

"Where does Mrs. Snow come in?"

"Just where Eunice Ray does. The woman's name may have been Snow a week ago, but it was not hers then."

"Go on! I am interested."

Ben spoke the truth. Whatever doubts he had entertained in the past of his being the same Paul Anderson wanted by Mrs. Snow were disappearing. His parents had been Philip and Margery. It was not likely there had been a couple of the name.

"The party," proceeded the detective, "were quiet, well-bred, refined people, and those who knew them recall that the suspicion was aroused that they had come from some higher walk in life."

"But the proof—the proof!"

"There was none. They kept their own council and told nothing of themselves. They were very happy together, young wife, husband and infant, and all went well for awhile. Then trouble began."

"What was the trouble?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WOMAN WITH THE WHIP.

Detective Charleston was taking matters easy, and he paused to brush a speck off of his clothes before answering.

"What trouble arose?" Ben repeated.

"Eunice Ray, the servant," replied the detective, "ran away with the valuables of her employers."

"Valuables? What valuables?"

"Money, to what an extent I do not know, and, worse, she took private papers—most valuable papers."

"What were they?"

"I don't know. The loss of said papers wholly upset the Andersons. The lost money was not lamented—the papers were. They must have been highly precious to them."

"No doubt."

"There was a theory in the house, based upon the former suspicions that they were from a wealthy family, that the documents referred to property of some sort. Certain it is that the theft nearly upset both young Anderson and his girl-wife."

"And then?"

"They soon left the house, and those who knew them never saw more of any of them."

Benjamin thought he could supply the missing part—the retreat, brought about by poverty, to Slippery Alley; the privation and separation, and the death of one parent after another.

"And Eunice Ray?" he asked, quietly.

"Philip Anderson tried to find her, but would not listen to the suggestion of putting the police on the track. Eunice was more than a mere servant, it seemed, and something like a friend, and her desertion, ingratitude and theft hurt their feelings. She was not found. Now, Mr. Richardson, observe the terms of the torn note I showed you, and it is clear that, at the time of her death, she was treating with somebody to tell what she knew of the past—of Paul Anderson. She died with her secret untold."

"With whom had she been treating?"

"I don't know that."

"Who was Philip Anderson?"

"I have no idea."

"The note said that Paul was heir to two hundred thousand dollars."

"Yes."

"Where is it located?"

"I have not the slightest theory. You have heard all I do know, and I see little chance of learning more of them."

"Your story really interests me. Can you suggest any way of getting full facts?"

"I cannot. The trail is years old, and very blind, at that."

"Suppose you were to find Paul Anderson?"

"Oh! in that case I would help him—unless," added the detective, with a smile, "he was the man who pushed the woman into the water. In that case I should have to hang him."

It was a chance remark, as far as could be seen, but it worried and alarmed Ben. Genial as the detective was to him, there seemed to be some hope that he would deal leniently with his son's "friend," but these hopes received so many shocks that the miner plainly saw Mr. Charleston placed duty above all else.

Awhile longer the detective lingered, and then he moved off to renew operations.

"This settles the point in regard to Mrs. Snow," thought Ben. "I am the Paul Anderson she wanted, and it seems I am heir to a big fortune. I never shall claim it. I don't care a rap for other people's hoarded money, and whoever made this fortune can pass it along to the next of kin after me, but I do want to know who I am. It isn't to my taste to be nameless. How shall I learn? With the death of Mrs. Snow went, perhaps, the last witness, and the documentary evidence went, too. Bad, bad!" He shook his head gloomily.

"Then there is Charleston's quest. That fellow is persevering and cunning, and he will solve all these conundrums of the pier tragedy, sooner or later—all but the one that should prove me inno-

cent. I don't see but I've got to swing for what I didn't do!"

Benjamin was in a mood of irritation, and he moved away in deep and painful thought. Despite his breezy manner, at times, he valued his reputation. Out in Montana men trusted him fully, and the fact pleased him.

Physical danger never worried him, but loss of reputation was a serious matter.

"The only consolation I can see in this," he grimly murmured, "is that I haven't got that two hundred thousand dollars. I shall not have to lose it when Charleston hangs me."

His unenviable frame of mind caused him to walk on rapidly without any definite purpose in view, and, before he realized the fact, he had gained an entirely different part of the city.

Finally he stopped short.

"Say, this isn't business," he exclaimed, "I am wearing my legs out all for nothing. I'll turn back and—"

His words stopped and he looked hard in advance.

"Albert Charleston, by George!"

The man named was certainly coming down the street. He had not noticed Ben, and something impelled the latter to avoid discovery wholly. As the block was deserted by all save themselves, and a single carriage which was rolling close after Albert, this would have been difficult had not the street been broken and thinly built upon.

A shanty stood just at one side, and Ben hastened to step behind it and relapse into inaction.

Through a crevice he could see young Charleston coming nearer, while the carriage as steadily closed up the gap between the moving objects.

The miner noticed that the occupant of the vehicle was a woman, but further than this he gave no heed.

Just as Albert was abreast the shanty the carriage drew up beside him, and Ben was surprised to see the occupant suddenly lean forward and lightly touch Albert with her whip.

"I want you!" she exclaimed.

"The dickens!" muttered the miner.

The woman was Kelma Downing!

Albert turned at the touch of the whip, and though his face was screened from Ben's view, it was clear that his discovery was not a pleasant one.

"I want you!" added Kelma.

"What do you want?" sullenly demanded the young man.

"Call your father off!"

"I don't understand."

"He has been molesting me and mine."

"The deuce he has!" exclaimed Albert. "Does he know—"

"Not yet."

"If he seeks to know he will."

"Be easy. He has not the slightest clew, I think. He has molested us on general principles—that's all. He has raided our den."

"Why?"

"I reckon it is a part of some detective case. I have good reason to believe he has no trail that leads to us directly. We, however, have our associates, and he was doubtless after them."

"Can you use no prudence?" bitterly demanded Albert.

"If we had not used prudence we should all be in trouble now. It was like this: We had two prisoners—one of which was a magnificent animal—and they escaped us. Willis Larimore was duly cautious, and he announced that we must fly the coop. We flew! Half an hour later your old man raided the coop. We had gone just in time."

"He has gained clew to the facts!" cried Albert, excitedly.

"I don't think it."

"Your reckless bravado will ruin me—or, maybe, you deliberately wish to ruin me."

"Wrong! I told you long ago that we wanted to shield you, for your influence with Detective Irad Charleston might one day help us. We need help now."

"How?"

"Call your old man off!"

"I can do nothing."

"Get into his confidence, and urge upon him that he should not waste any time on a side-issue. He must let us alone. We have a new den, but he may find us if he seeks. Keep him from seeking."

"Woman, do you expect this of me?"

"No. I demand it!"

"Demand?"

"So I said. If you can't be useful you are of no value at all, and I had as soon ruin you as not."

"Fiend!"

"Words are cheap, but actions count. How is it?—can we rely upon you? Will you help us, or shall we ruin you?"

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ENEMY'S HARD TERMS.

Albert turned slightly and Ben Richardson caught sight of his face. The detective's son was pale, and it was clear that Kelma was worrying him more than words could express. She was easy of manner, but inexorable as death, and Albert must know that he had a foe who would show no mercy.

"What do you want?" he asked in a tremulous voice.

"I have told you," Kelma answered.

"Call Detective Irad Charleston off the trail!"

"That would be to hasten the exposure I so much dread."

"Have you no diplomacy?"

"I fear not."

"Then cultivate it—it is needed now. Do you want the story of certain episodes in your life made public?"

"Woman, you are merciless!"

"True, I am!"

"Have you no womanly feeling?—no regard for a man who—"

"I understand. Well, I have regard for myself only. As long as you are useful to me I am your best friend, but cross me and the fur will fly. You know my power. It is absolute. Can I not ruin you if I try?"

"Yes."

"Then win mercy by deserving it. Remember your father—remember your sister!"

"Do I not remember them? I think of nothing else. It would kill them to have the whole miserable truth known."

"Just the way I look at it."

"I stand on a precipice. All is dark around me—there is no light. Ruin threatens me!—ay, death!"

He paused a moment and then forcibly added:

"Death! It is a joyful possibility. There is a man with a grudge against me who threatens to shoot me. He knows not how little he alarms me when he threatens. Would he were here this minute! I would open my arms and bare my heart to him!—I would give him all the chance in the world and cry out: 'I am here!—shoot!'"

The Montana Man thrilled under the power of the words. Deep pity for Albert welled up in his generous heart, and he forgot his vendetta wholly. He could hardly repress the inclination to rush forth and offer his help to subdue and defeat Kelma Downing.

The adventuress was less moved. A smile curled her full lips.

"Don't act the heroic," she advised. "Practical words are more desirable than empty dramatics. Calm down and talk business."

Albert made a gesture of loathing.

"How is it?" pursued Kelma. "Will you do what I wish?"

"I don't know whether I will or not."

"Then I tell all."

"Do it, and I shall shoot myself."

"Brave recourse!"

"At least it is effectual."

"Remember your father and sister."

Albert's head fell. He seemed to droop and lose all his strength.

"Some of the best stories in this world never have been told," Kelma went on, easily. "Maybe yours never will be, but if it is not, it will be because you deserve

silence on my part. That old affair will not down, and you may as well know it. I will be your friend if you will be mine, but unless you obey me, I shall strike. If I do strike—well, you know what I can tell!"

"I am helpless!" admitted Albert, with a deep sigh. "Give your orders."

"I have done it. Call your father off!"

"I'll do my best."

"Enough! Do that, and all will go merrily, but I shall have my eye on you. Don't play me false. Good-day!"

She touched her horse, and, a moment later, was moving away. She was not called back. Albert stood in silence and watched, while Ben Richardson watched both the others.

"Lost!" murmured the detective's son.

Ben could hardly keep from moving out and speaking to him, but it was plain nothing good would come of such a course. He kept his place and waited.

Long after Kelma had gone from sight, Albert looked after her, but he finally aroused and walked off in an opposite direction.

"Well, now!" exclaimed Ben, "this grows interesting. Al is getting it from all quarters. Wonder what hold the woman has got on him that beats him so completely? Why, the fellow must have done some mighty serious thing to make him so scared of her. She has got him by the neck, sure. Al is a villain, and this makes me all the more determined to pay off my grudge. At first chance I will shoot him—but then, there's his sister. I had forgotten that."

Benjamin walked on with a plodding gait, that had little suggestion of his usual buoyancy. His taste for violent revenge was fading away, and he would have felt more like taking the first train for Shagbark than anything else, had it not been for the suddenly awakened hope of solving the mystery of his birth.

"I've got to see that out," he decided. "If there's a grain of hope I will seize it. Maybe, while I am waiting I can fight that duel with Al Charleston. If I happen to feel that I don't want to kill him I can shoot into the air—that will relieve my feelings."

This remarkable means of getting satisfaction for a wrong was not proposed as a joke. Benjamin meant it.

He had gone several blocks when, turning a corner, he almost collided with a man who proved to be an acquaintance. The two looked at each other and then smiled.

"Hallo, Lawyer Gardner!" exclaimed the Big Butte delegate.

"Oh! is it you, Mr. Richardson? I am pleased to meet you, sir."

"Ditto here, partner. How is the head this A. M.?"

"I am glad to say I feel no ill effects from the attack of those denizens of the slums."

"That's good. They don't always leave their victims in as good shape as that."

"It was through no good will of theirs. Of course what they wanted was my money, and the means and results were another matter. As luck would have it, they hit me in no vital part. That was luck—no more."

"A tough gang, I'll be bound."

"They prove my theory."

"Yes?"

"They were degenerates; the products of low life, which are the efforts of nature to cast off the decaying branches of the tree of life."

"Just so."

"Whom nature would destroy, she first makes depraved."

"And whom thugs would destroy, must first accumulate cash."

Edmund Gardner smiled. He might be a man with a theory, but he was a wise and practical man, withal.

"Money, instrument of good and evil—as we use it."

"It plays the dickens, sometimes. Well, what are you about, to-day, if I may ask?"

"Seeking material for my book."

"Find any?"

"It is in almost every face, form and movement that I see in this section. It is in the ill-paved streets, the reeking gutter, the trembling and unplumbed houses, the slinking cats and the flea-bitten dogs of the slums."

"You mean that you find it everywhere in this section?"

"Yes."

"I find some, myself."

Mr. Gardner brightened up perceptibly.

"Really, my dear sir! I am delighted to hear you say that. Now, when you have a leisure evening, can't you come around and see me, and give me an account of your observations for my book?"

"I reckon I might."

"Do so, do so! I shall be most grateful, sir."

"I'll drop in on you."

Gardner was pleased, and he said so. He and Benjamin remained in conversation for some time longer, and then they separated, and each went his way.

The miner shook his head dubiously.

"That man would deceive a good many," he muttered. "His talk about his alleged hobby is natural as life, but it don't go down with me. Of all men, he is the last to get interested in such rubbish as he claims is engrossing his attention. He has a double meaning, and I still think he is a spy of some sort."

The miner stopped short.

"Say, it won't do any harm to see what he does next."

Wheeling, he retraced his steps and was soon quietly following where Edmund Gardner went. The manner of the Englishman confirmed all that the miner suspected. He did not seem to be studying low life, but walked briskly along without noticing what was to be seen by the way.

After a time Ben began to hesitate.

"I don't like this," he thought.

The pursuit was taking him toward the hotel where he had been stopping when the Mrs. Snow affair occurred.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DANGEROUS NIGHT WATCHMAN.

Only for a moment did the Montana man allow his fears to influence him. If the evidence was troublesome it also promised to reveal something of importance, and he kept as close to Edmund Gardner as was safe.

Presently they were on the very block where the Good Report Hotel stood, and there the pursuer again lagged. He was satisfied that the Englishman would seek cover there, and he was not in error.

Mr. Gardner entered the Good Report Hotel.

"That settles it!" declared the miner, stopping short. "I felt sure, all the while, that he was a police spy. This proves it. He is on the Mrs. Snow case. I wonder if it was chance that I met him?"

A period of meditation, and then the decision.

"No! Gardner planned it so. I am suspected, and he was shadowing me when we first met. He is on my trail! I wonder if he is in union with Irad Charleston? Probably he is a Scotland Yard detective, though it can't be he was sent over here on this especial case—there hasn't been time enough. Anyhow, I am glad I know him as he is. I reckon I won't go into the hotel—not if the petit jury knows her mind! So-long, Edmund!"

He waved his hand toward the Good Report and beat a masterly retreat.

The latest theories were not to his liking, but he did not regard Gardner with the awe he felt for Irad Charleston. The latter gentleman impressed him as being as dangerous as mortal man could be.

What did it matter that a little was added to his perils?

Presently he was far enough away to feel that he was safe, and he abated his speed, smiled and looked back.

"I reckon I am all right for this time. Nobody in sight but one man, and he looks as if he was a mere laborer. All is lovely until the next crisis comes."

The one man to whom he referred was moving faster than Ben, and, though the miner took no heed of him, he rapidly closed up the gap. He was getting no attention, and it was a surprise to Ben when a voice at his side said:

"Fine day, sir!"

The man from Shagbark turned and saw the laborer smiling into his face benignly.

"There are no flies on the weather," admitted Benjamin, with his usual nonchalance.

"Walking for you health?"

"No. Just to encourage my boot-maker."

"Ha, ha! Very fine joke."

"Maybe you are a cobbler?"

"I am a night watchman!"

Ben suddenly lost his careless air.

"You are, eh?"

"Yes. In a warehouse down on one of the piers."

There was something suggestive in the laborer's manner, and the Black Butte representative gave him close attention.

"What are you doing now?"

"Watching!"

"What are you watching at this hour?"

"You."

"My friend, I see that you are a joker."

"No. I am a very serious man; never do any joking at all. It is perfectly true when I say I am watching you."

"The law allows you that privilege."

"Yes, but it denies people the right to push women off from piers into the East River!"

This startling statement was plainly made, and it sent a chill along Ben's nerves. If he had been suspicious before he had positive proof now, and he found the old fear of New York law flash into new life and threatening presence. Startled as he was he made an effort to remain cool.

"Your mind takes a queer flight, sir, but that's your right."

"Did you ever hear of such a case?"

"I believe I have read something of the sort, lately, in a city newspaper."

"I thought you would read it."

"Why?"

"Because you are the man who pushed Mrs. Snow to her death!" distinctly declared the man.

"Oh! come, now, don't be foolish. I like a joke, but only from my friends. You are a stranger to me."

"My name is Roger Hanks, and I am the watchman so much mentioned in the newspapers. You know I saw you push her off the pier, and—"

"I know nothing of the sort. I have not pushed any woman from a pier, or anywhere else."

Hank smiled again, and it was a most disagreeable smile.

"Let us understand each other," he suggested, coolly. "Since this thing happened on the pier I have been employing my time of days in walking the streets to look for the man who pushed her to her death. I knew his height and build very closely, and then, I have made a specialty of the different movements of men. Each man has a carriage different from that of his fellows."

"I have no carriage—not even a bicycle," replied Ben, trying to turn proceedings into a joke.

"I refer to gait, movement. I knew that if I saw you walking I could spot you. I happened to see you over by the Good Report Hotel, and I knew you right away. You have shaved off your beard, but you couldn't change your gait."

"Mr. Hanks, what brand do you drink?"

"Eh?"

"You've got the jim-jams."

"We will not argue that point. You see that I have found you out. Now, what is my duty?"

"First, to leave off imbibing whisky; next, to take a bath!"

"See here!" cried Hanks, angrily, "you will gain nothing by insulting me! I have knowledge in this case that nobody else possesses. I am a poor man, and I should be a fool not to make all

the cash out of it that I can. I can make something by telling the police that I have discovered the doer of the pier deed, but maybe you will pay me more to keep still."

"My dear sir, you have a genius for boiling things down. In this matter there is but one flaw."

"What is that?"

"You have the wrong man. I am not the person who pushed Mrs. Snow into the dock."

"I know you are. I recognize you by your face, form and gait. I know I am right."

"You are at liberty to think so, but you will not make money out of your delusion. I refuse to pay a cent!"

"Then I will go to the police."

"All right. Go right ahead!"

"Come, now, you will not be so foolish! I don't want to do harm to a decent man like you. I am an honest man, myself—"

"Nobody can doubt that!" drily replied the man from Big Butte.

"And I like to help other honest men. Just give me a decent sum and I will never give you away."

"Correct!—you won't. Why? Because there is nothing to give away. Once and for all, I tell you I never pushed the woman from the pier; you are mistaken. If you try to carry out your plan you will only make yourself ridiculous. Drop it!"

"This is to be expected; of course you would not be fool enough to admit anything. I don't ask you to. All I want is that you will help me a little financially. I have a wife and six children, and it is hard to support them in comfort. Now, just give a trifle in charity, and you can bet I won't give you away."

"I hate to refuse a needy man like you, but I can't manage an asylum filled with orphans who have parents living. As this is all a mistake, I shall not give you a cent."

Benjamin was resolute, but he did not feel the courage he pretended to have. He believed that this man would have him under lock and key in a short time; but, above all things, he was determined not to submit to blackmail.

"Let us not be in a hurry to decide this," suggested Hank, mildly. "You shall have time to think it over, and you'll see how reasonable I am. I'll leave you for now. I have fifty cents in cash, and it will feed the children today. To-morrow, I trust, you will be ready to do what is right. I'll see you again. For now, sir, good-day! Remember, I am your friend, and not disposed to do you injury. I remain, sir, very respectfully yours, Roger Hanks!"

With this remarkable farewell the watchman backed off. He kept his gaze on Ben and clearly hoped to be called back, but he did not meet with such good luck, and he receded until, suddenly turning, he walked off with his face away from the miner.

The Montana Miner stood still.

"By George! I am in for it! This fellow has solved my identity, and if he speaks out it will be all day with me. Bad! Already I feel the tenacious embrace of the hempen rope!"

CHAPTER XXI.

BIG BUTTE BEN'S BLIND BARGAIN.

There was no disposition to jest on the miner's part. He had talked bravely to Roger Hanks, but he well understood that his peril had grown very much greater. A blackmailer had come into the case, and he was at the fellow's mercy.

"There's brief reprieve," he thought, "but, in a day or two, I shall have to pay tribute or be arrested. And if I submit to arrest, who will prove me innocent? I am a stranger in a strange place, and it will go hard with me."

Considerably discouraged by this state of affairs, he pursued his way and gained the seclusion of his own room. He wanted to think the situation over and arrive at some plan of action.

He gave the needed thought, and then arrived at his decision.

"I came here to finish Albert Charleston up, and I ought to do it, but he has an old father and a sister, and it would fall heavily on them to lose him. I would go straight back to the Bear Mine were it not for Mrs. Snow and the trail she left behind her. The hope of learning who I am is aroused, and I shall not give it up."

His face grew doggedly firm, and he concluded:

"I'll stick to my position and purposes. I shall stay here! I shall try to learn all about my parents, and, as I may as well be in for a dollar as a cent, I'll visit Albert Charleston and call for that long-delayed duel. I'll show my teeth all around!"

The careless manner of the man was gone, and it was plain that he was of iron will when aroused.

"I have been easy long enough. From this time on I'll fight my way. Yes, and it will be Shagbark style, too."

The miner was still meditating when footsteps outside the door were followed by a knock. He bade the person enter, and Hick Ransom made his appearance.

"So it's you, is it?" Ben greeted.

"Yes. Didn't think I was George Washington, did you?"

"You remind me more of Billy Patterson, the man who got struck."

Hick sat down, heavily.

"How do you feel after our adventure?"

"Fine!"

"I am a bit sore of body, an' I wouldn't have come 'round, only I hev got something fer your perusal. When we left the house where Larimore and his gang held sweet sway I picked up something that impressed me as being worth it. See?"

He held up an article at which Ben looked curiously.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Give it here."

Hick obeyed, and then Ben quickly burst into a laugh.

"It's clear that you never lived in Slippery Alley," he remarked. "Such a thing as this is often seen there."

"What is it?"

"A pawnbroker's check. By means of this the owner can get something out of pawn. So you found it near Larimore's quarters?"

"In the hall of his house."

"Seems that some of the party has been pawning something."

"What?"

"The check tells nothing. You will see that there's a name on it—Pittson Levi, and a Bowery address."

"Is that all?"

"All but the date."

Benjamin spoke thoughtfully. He noticed that the date was one of suggestive nature. It was the day after his strange adventures began.

"Found in Larimore's quarters," he added, slowly.

"Yes."

"I suppose I am a fool—"

The miner stopped, and Hick, after waiting a while, anxiously asked:

"Why?"

"Do you know, I have a notion to go and see if I can get this out. I don't know much about the ways of such places. I used to see plenty of pawn-checks in my childhood, but those I was with were too poor to have anything to pawn, and my information was all on the surface. It was all many years ago, too."

"You might do it."

"Ransom, do you know the names of any of the crowd that were with Larimore?"

"The thin man was Peter Glynn, and the one with the full beard was Luke Haggerty. He looks a bit like you, only he is rough and brutal-looking."

"Thank you for the addition."

"All the likeness is in your shape, and the color of your hair. It certainly would be unjust to you ter say you looked like him, but there would be some passin' similarity ef you had a full beard."

"Um! um! um!" muttered Big Butte, looking at the check.

"Haggerty is homely, though, an' you are a pretty fine-appearin' chap."

"Don't go on that way, Mr. Ransom, or I shall feel too vain to associate with plain men like you. Say, will you give this check to me?"

"Yes."

"I am going to try an experiment. Come with me and see how it will work."

The miner had made up his mind to visit the pawn-shop, and he went about it without delay. He took Hick along with him until near the place, and then posted him on a corner.

"If I get slain in there just weep twice or three times over me," he requested. "So-long!"

With firm step he entered the shop. A man with a bald head and whiskers that bristled like quills was behind the counter, and he put on a most benevolent smile. Evidently he expected something to be pawned, but Ben threw the check down on the counter and called out:

"Give me that stuff!"

"Yes, sir; yes, sir!" was the polite reply.

The keeper produced his book and looked up the entry.

"What name?" he asked.

"Luke Haggerty," promptly replied the miner.

The pawnbroker held the check in a gingerly manner and looked doubtful and uncertain.

"You are not the man who left the article here," he observed.

"What of that? No trouble with your books, is there?"

"No. It is down to Haggerty, but—"

"Well, what?"

"Why didn't Haggerty come himself?"

"He sent me. What of it? There's your check—hand out the stuff."

Levi leaned forward over the counter and his brow bristled about as much as his whiskers as he bent his anxious eyes upon the Montana Miner.

"The check is correct," he admitted, "but how am I to know this matter is all right?"

"Why the dickens should it be otherwise?"

"The trouble is that I don't know you, and I don't want to make any mistake. The police are very meddlesome nowadays," Levi explained.

"If you can keep further away from the police than I want to you will do mighty well!" exclaimed Ben.

"It may be all right, but I don't know you. Just ask Haggerty to come in, will you?"

"He is laid up with a hurt, and he can't come. Now, fork over, old man. I am tired of waiting. Produce the stuff, and do it right quick!"

"Can't you get a note from Haggerty?" asked the pawnbroker, anxiously.

"I'm not a postman! There is the check—fork over the goods or there will be a riot here!"

The miner's manner was sharp and aggressive, and Levi's face took on new wrinkles until it was like a railroad map. His disturbed condition gave Ben an idea and he proceeded to act upon it. Knowing that the lower class of pawnbrokers were in constant, and well-founded, fear of the police, he perceived that this was the trouble now. Seeing this he abruptly changed his manner and added:

"Don't be worried, old man! Fact is, Haggerty had a little scrap with the police, last night, and he is laid up for repairs. He sent me. He didn't say there would be any trouble, and you can bet your bottom dollar I shall not go to the police. I don't want to get within seven miles of them!"

This change of base worked wonders. Levi brightened up and assured his visitor that, while he always did business on the square, he had to be very careful not to offend his customers—or the police.

With matters thus started the rest was easy, and he produced a small box and set it before the miner.

There was fifteen dollars to pay upon it, but Ben Richardson did not hesitate. He handed over the money and took the box, and then made himself solid with the pawnbroker by giving him a cigar.

"When Haggerty comes in he will tell you this is all right," he added. "Fact is, I am his brother. Mention Tom Haggerty to him and see what he will say."

The miner was not disposed to delay, and was soon outside the shop and walking off. At the corner he found Hick on guard.

"What luck?" the Herkimer county man inquired.

"We shall know when this box is opened. Just now it is a secret. Come on, and we will solve it right quick!"

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT WAS IN THE BOX.

The Man from Montana had become interested in his case, and he stepped off with speed that made Hick Ransom almost trot to keep up with him. In due time Ben's hotel was reached, and they entered his room.

Locking the door, he set the box on the table.

"Here she is!" he exclaimed. "What she is no man here present knoweth. I have acted on an impulse, urged on by vague suspicions that may be wholly unfounded. Now, let us see what Luke Haggerty put in pawn."

The box was of plush, and locked, as Ben soon discovered, but he did not allow that to delay him much. He introduced his knife-blade into the crevice between box proper and cover, and then pried away until he forced the lock.

Hick was all eagerness, but Ben paused for a moment.

"I suppose this is a pretty lawless affair. What right have I to this box?"

"As good as the Larimore gang," assumed Hick. "What are they but thieves, anyhow?"

"I reckon you know their calibre."

The miner threw back the cover.

"A watch!" cried the up-country man.

"Yes, and a lady's watch at that."

"Say, that's valuable."

"Somewhat, but you will see that it is well worn. Old age fell on it long ago. It wouldn't sell for a fortune, and I wonder that so much money ever was got on it. The suspicion grows upon me that Haggerty is a professional thief, and old Levi his regular broker. Maybe he gave him extra pay because—"

Benjamin had opened the watch and was looking at its interior mechanism. He stopped short as he saw an inscription inside, and then went to the light.

Once there it was easily read.

"Anything new?" inquired Hick.

There was no reply. A peculiar expression had come to the miner's face, and he stared at the inscription without hearing the inquiry. This was what he read:

"To Eunice Ray, in token of faithful service, from Margery and Phillip Anderson."

"What is it?" added Hick.

Still the Western man was silent; still he heard nothing. In his mind, however, there was a wild flight of ideas, and he was more moved than he had been in many a day.

Eunice Ray's watch!—and she had been the same person as Mrs. Snow! Remarkable fact!

How had the watch come in Levi's pawnshop? Had he made a mistake in handing over the package? But, no; that was not at all likely—it must be the same that Haggerty had sent to the place.

Another link in the chain that connected Mrs. Snow with the past had been welded. She had been a faithless servant in the end, but the fact that the watch had been given to her was good evidence that she had once been more than trusted.

The whole wretched drama of the past swept over Ben as he looked, but

he was not one to remain long absorbed in such thoughts. Something else occurred to him.

Where had Haggerty obtained the watch?

"He pawned it the morning after the adventures on the pier," muttered the miner. "By George! this is queer. How did he get it?"

A thought came to him so striking that he started back.

The man who had followed Mrs. Snow to the pier, and who had robbed her when there, had worn a full beard.

So did Luke Haggerty!

Hick Ransom had given up asking questions, and he sat still and watched his companion. He had seen various shades of emotion pass over the latter's face, but the stillness and perfect self-control of the miner finally became more marked than his agitation.

"What is it?" persisted Hick, curiously.

Benjamin walked forward and sat down by his ally.

"What do you know of Willis Larimore's gang?" he asked, coolly.

"No good."

"Be plain! Are they law-breakers?"

"Well, I guess so."

"Don't be so crafty, man! Out with what you know."

"They are law-breakers, an' they live by theft."

"What is their particular branch?"

"Anything that will yield cash, I think."

"You hesitate; you are keeping something back. Tell it all!"

"I can't be more definite."

"You need not fear to trust me. I know as well as you do that you have been mixed up with them, and that you, too, fear the law—"

"Why, that's wrong!"

"Nonsense! That has been clear to me all the while. You went back on them, or they went back on you. I don't care which. You should know by this time that I have no idea of giving you away. Will you tell all you know?"

"I only know they are crooked—"

"Enough! I shall not press the point. Keep your secret, if you are so set on it."

Again Ben turned his attention to the watch. What was its recent history? In his conversation with Mrs. Snow on the pier she had been nearly frantic because of the loss of something which she had said was dashed from her hand into the dock. He had then asked if the thief had taken anything else. She had said he did not, but she had been terribly excited over the loss of the object that was dashed into the water. He did not think she was in condition to know whether she had been robbed of anything that she deemed of less value or not.

The miner sat with his attention so fixed upon his trophy that Hick began to move restlessly. Perhaps, too, he was afraid he would be subjected to more questioning, and he finally rose.

"I'll leave ye now," he remarked.

"You are interested in the box, an' I've got an errant ter do. I'll come in again."

Ben aroused enough to say a few formal words to pacify any resentment that might be in Hicks's mind, and, also, to say that if he could keep the box he would see that Hick lost nothing by it. Then the latter went his way.

Left alone the younger man still mused over the box.

"It is far from new," he murmured.

"The plush shows signs of wear, and it is doubtless as old as the watch. All went together, I imagine, when the present was made to Eunice Ray. My poor parents!"

He touched the various parts of the box, and then noticed something clinging to what seemed to be the bottom, that looked like a small piece of string that had dropped in.

Seeking to pick it out he discovered that it was fast at one end.

Pulling slightly he was surprised to see the supposed bottom rise and reveal a recess below.

"Hallo! what's this? Another compartment, and—why, there's something inside!"

Folded papers were there, and he lifted the first of them. Hurriedly he spread it out.

"A marriage certificate! What! Philip Anderson and Margery Lyeth! I don't know my mother's maiden name, but there can be no doubt as to the identity in the case. I have the marriage certificate."

He gazed raptly at the paper for a time. He was too much moved to notice anything more just then, but presently he discovered more.

"Something carefully erased! What can it have been? By George! I should say it must have been the place where they were married. The date is here—yes, it must have been the place."

He believed he could understand why this was done. Eunice Ray, alienated from Philip Anderson and his wife, and, by her own choice, a thief, had not cared to have too much or too definite information about her to tell of her old life.

Such was his theory; but, one thing was sure—the place of marriage was missing.

The Man from Montana went further. Another paper remained to be seen, and he unfolded it. This document proved to be a part of a letter. It lacked beginning and end, but what there was was decidedly interesting.

He read as follows from the indefinite and abrupt beginning:

"March 18th was received we have been anxious to hear from you again, and the latest favor was much appreciated. Since my last Mr. Thomas Anderson has so much improved in health that we have freely told him all. We now write by his advice.

"He will overlook all of the past, if you will keep your part of the bargain, as proposed by you. He is old, feeble, childless and gloomy as to the future of his house. If you can give him an heir, and prove that that heir is his grandson, Paul Alaric Anderson, there will be perfect freedom from prosecution on your part.

"As I wrote you before, there is a fortune of \$200,000 at stake in this matter. Either it goes to Paul, son of Philip and Margery Anderson, and grandson of Mr. Thomas Anderson, or to a distant relative.

"I regret to say that you failed to mention in what exact part of the poverty-blasted section of New York the family lived when you were with them. Kindly be clear when you write again.

"Be faithful in this and you shall be rewarded, while you will have the satisfaction of placing young Paul Anderson in wealth and honors, as the heir of a noble family."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A REMARKABLE CHANGE.

Ben Richardson let the paper fall and plunged into thought.

"If I had felt a doubt it would be gone now. I am the Paul Anderson of this case, but, who are the others? Mrs. Snow, or Eunice Ray, played my parents false and run away with valuable evidence. She has kept it all these years—kept it until her conscience was awakened, it seemed, and then she tried to undo the past.

"I have a grandfather. His name is Thomas Anderson. What more? Who is he? Where does he live? For some reason Mrs. Snow mutilated all her letters, or, as I should perhaps say, retained only such parts as seemed valuable to her. No address appears in any form. Who wrote this letter? From what place did he write it?

"Most of all, how am I to find this aged grandfather? He cannot be in New

York, I should say. But, wait! Eunice may have been remote from here when she corresponded thus. She surely was not in the city proper, or she would not have gone to the Good Report Hotel later.

"Why, my grandfather may be right in this city now! Aged, weak, confined to his room, no doubt, he may still be awaiting more news from Mrs. Snow, and I—how am I to communicate with him?"

Again the miner gave attention to the box and its contents. He examined everything with strictest care, hunting for something that would be a clew, but, when he had finished, he was as far from a solution of the mystery as ever.

There was not a particle of light on the residence of Thomas Anderson, or one of the other persons who had taken part in the affair.

"And," exclaimed Ben, in conclusion, "Mrs. Snow is drowned. Now, how am I to learn who I am?"

It looked like a difficult thing to do, and Ben shook his head as he considered it. Had not the last hope gone with the death of Mrs. Snow?

He was still musing when a bell-boy appeared to say that a gentleman wished to see the miner. The caller had given no name, but Ben directed that he be escorted up at once.

It was done, and, much to Ben's surprise, Albert Charleston put in an appearance.

"Hallo, old man!" exclaimed the owner of the Bear Mine, cordially.

"Hallo!"

Albert spoke weakly, and Ben noticed that he did not look well. Albert was pale and seemed to have suddenly lost flesh surprisingly.

"Take a chair!" directed Ben, and the caller complied.

"I'm glad to see you here," added the host. "This is my first chance to entertain you, and, as I am unprepared, I may not do it very well, but you are not the less welcome."

Young Charleston listened apathetically.

"I have come to see about the duel!" he abruptly announced.

Ben looked seriously troubled.

"I don't understand you," he muttered.

"I want the date set."

"Why so?"

"When there is business to do we should go ahead in a business way."

"Do you really mean that?"

"Certainly."

"Never mind about the duel, old man. There is no hurry."

"I do not agree with you. There is hurry, and I want it attended to at once."

The miner was bewildered, but he rallied somewhat.

"As to that duel," he answered, "I reckon we may as well postpone it forever. There is a law against it, you know."

"Never mind the law. When can we fight?"

"You were not so anxious to fight a while ago."

"What we have to consider is the present. I will leave all details to you, and all I want is to know the place and date. I will be on hand."

"Old man, let's call the duel off!"

"I insist upon fighting!" declared Albert.

"Do you want my blood so much as that?"

"Drop argument. When do we fight?"

"Well, I'll be jinged!"

Benjamin muttered the words in a helpless way. He saw that Albert meant all he said, and it was incomprehensible. He stared hard at the visitor, and then drew his chair closer to his side.

"Now, see here, Al," he argued, "I don't care a rap about this. True, you shot me, and stole my money, but I presume you didn't know the rifle was loaded, while as for the cash, we all get short of money now and then. Your excuses are reasonable—"

"I have not made any excuses."

"I've made them for you."

"Don't trouble yourself."

"Then, again, I was sick only five or six weeks from the wound, so it was all a small matter. The Bear Mine will pan out enough to make me laugh over this, later on; and as for you—I forgot it, Al. There's my hand!"

He held out his broad palm, but Albert gave no sign of taking it.

"I decline to settle this quarrel thus!" he asserted.

"Oh! come, now; there has no harm been done. I presume your only thought in shooting was to scare me a bit, but you shot too straight. Then, again, you may not have made due allowance for the rarefied air of the mountains. I reckon you only intended to clip a fragment off from my shirt, pard, but the bullet got too close. Eh?"

To an outsider Ben's desperate efforts to find an excuse for his companion would have been laughable, but there was no thought of jests in his own mind. He was thoroughly in earnest.

"You were shot deliberately," Albert declared, "and, after things have gone so far, there is nothing left to do but fight. Now, don't try to smooth things over any more. Name the time and place!"

"But, Al, we don't want to fight. I hold you no grudge. Remember your sister!"

"Remember that you were shot."

"Say, didn't your gun go off accidentally?"

"You are making us both ridiculous. I will not listen to such nonsense. The duel must come off. The time! The place!"

Thus far Albert had been apathetic, but he now stirred into new life and his voice rang out sharply. He glared at Ben and looked quite as fierce as the latter had done at their first interview.

"I would like to know," suggested Ben, "what has made you change your position in this affair. A little while ago you were bound not to fight, and, now that I have come around to your way of thinking, you insist upon the old programme."

"I am not going to let you crawl out of it. We must fight!"

"I won't!" declared Ben, stoutly, and he added:

"Remember your sister!"

"Do you make her your excuse for backing out?"

The miner flushed at that insinuation of cowardice.

"Come, come!" he urged, "that isn't fair."

"All of your devices will avail you nothing. Fight you shall, or I will make you sorry for it. Here in New York we are not afraid to back up our words. Are you scared?"

There was a sneer in Albert's manner that touched Ben deeply. He was touched in his most vulnerable point, and it was hard to bear. The visitor had discovered this, and he at once added:

"Fight, or be branded a coward!"

The man from Big Butte rose abruptly and began to pace the room excitedly. He thought of Lezel Charleston and was filled with pity for her, but the accusation pressed upon him was too much to bear. Albert watched him closely and pitilessly.

"When shall it be?" asked Ben, huskily.

"The sooner, the better."

"Where?"

"Some lonely spot over on the Palisades."

"Name, place and hour!"

"The time, sunrise to-morrow; the exact place to be selected in the morning."

"Done!"

"Enough!" replied Charleston, rising. "We shall need no seconds. Meet me at Weehawken Ferry at day light to-morrow."

"I will be there."

"I will bid you good-day!"

Albert moved toward the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STARTLING SITUATION.

Anxiously the Man from Montana watched Albert go. He still had some hope that the duel might be averted, but, without a backward look, Albert walked stiffly out from the room, closed the door, and disappeared.

Ben stood still, looking at the door.

"Well, I'll be jinged!" he muttered.

He finally sat down.

"I'm in for it!" he admitted, gloomily. "I've got to fight him. I came all the way from Black Butte Hills to do it, and it must be done. We must fight!"

"This will be a terrible blow to his sister. I am as sure of hitting him as I am to look along the barrel of my revolver. I couldn't miss if I tried. It will wreck her life—"

He stopped short, and then brightened up.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "I won't do that man harm if I die for it! He insists on a duel, and he shall have it. Yes, I'll go to the dueling ground, and will let him shoot. I'll shoot, too, but not at him. I'll fire into the air!"

That way out of the difficulty seemed to bring him great relief.

"If he is a decent shot he will drop me," pursued Ben, thoughtfully. "Now, what shall I have done with my body? Maybe if I give him money enough he will see that it is shipped to Shagbark. Or I might rely upon Hick Ransom to do that. As near as I can figure it out, Hick has broken the law in some way, but he isn't the worst of men. I'll arrange with him to do it. I'll leave a letter to Pony Sam directing him to make my grave on the side of Buttercup Ridge, just above Babel Gulch, and under the big trees. I reckon I shall sleep better there than elsewhere."

The Man from Montana had grown quite cheerful, and his troubles passed away, seemingly, as he meditated on sleeping under the flowers that dotted Buttercup Ridge, of the Black Butte Hills!

Perhaps an hour had passed when there was a knock at his door. He listlessly bade the applicant enter, but his indifference vanished when he saw Irad Charleston.

"He has come to arrest me!" thought the Montana Miner.

The detective had paused on the threshold, and his expression told nothing. Ben, however, did not wait to study it. He stepped forward promptly.

"Mr. Charleston," he announced, "I will give myself up! I am your prisoner!"

"Do you admit," asked the detective, "that you are the man of the pier tragedy?"

"Yes. Lock me up!"

"Ha, ha! Very good! I only wish the real criminal was as willing. In that case he would save me a good deal of bother. I appreciate your joke all the more because it is rather new. Mr. Richardson, I am weary. Will you set out the cigars?"

"With all my heart. Here is one I recommend."

"Thanks! You see, I have been chasing after the fellow who killed Mrs. Snow until I am tired out. I haven't the slightest idea who he is, yet."

Ben mechanically lighted a match and passed it over to his visitor. He perceived that he was wrong in thinking the detective was there to arrest him, but he was not sure he was glad to be free from that danger. If he was locked up he could not fight Albert.

"You," added Irad, "are lucky. You are without hard work to do, and you have nothing to worry you."

"Not a thing!" replied Ben, with concealed sarcasm.

"Happy as a lark, so to speak."

"I'm a regular Punch and Judy show for happiness."

The detective leaned back and enjoyed his cigar.

"Mr. Richardson," he announced, "I am not without hope of ending my case."

"I thought you said you had no clew."

"I have none to the identity of the man, but I think I know his whereabouts, and that will serve to solve his identity."

"Where is he?"

"In this very hotel!"

"The dickens he is!"

"So I figure it out. Didn't know you were so close to him, did you? He may be somebody known to you."

"Quite likely."

"It is like this," added the detective.

"The fellow has pawned something stolen from Mrs. Snow, and he had the poor judgment to take it out of pawn at this critical juncture. That's the way I spotted him." The pawnbroker of the case was one Levi, down on the Bowery—Pittson Levi!"

Ben heard with fresh alarm. He glanced toward the table upon which still stood the plush box he had that day reclaimed from Pittson Levi's shop. It was a severe shock, for, though he was ready to fall in a duel, he did not want to be branded a murderer.

"How did you learn all this?" he inquired.

"Of course. I have been shadowing the pawnshops all through this affair. If the thief really got anything pawnable he would seek the haven of his sort if he dared. It was not until a few hours ago that I gained my clew."

"How did you do it?"

"I called on old Levi. I had been there before, but this time he was in different mood. He was scared and worried, and he spoke right to the point."

"What did he say?"

"That he believed my man had been in there, only a few minutes before, and taken something out of pawn. Of course, we never have known what, if anything, was stolen from Mrs. Snow, so my hunt in pawnshops has been vague, but Levi now declared that a man answering the description of the guilty person had been in."

Ben did some quick thinking. He suspected that the real Luke Haggerty had been to the shop soon after he was there, and that a scheme had been hatched by Haggerty and Levi to throw suspicion upon the man who had claimed to be the former's agent.

It looked like a scheme to save Haggerty at Ben's expense.

The miner glanced again at the box.

"I've got to get that thing out of sight, and secretly!" he anxiously thought.

"More than this," placidly continued the detective, blowing out a wreath of smoke, "Levi was sharp enough, when the article was taken from pawn, to follow the fellow who got it. He tracked him to this very hotel."

"He may have dodged in to throw Levi off the track."

"That, too, is possible. We are going to settle it."

"How?"

"Levi is coming here. He will be here in a few minutes, and then he will be shown every inmate of the place, to pick his man!"

Little did the detective imagine what a bombshell he had thrown into Benjamin's camp. The last hope seemed to die away, for he could not expect Pittson Levi to fail to recognize him.

"The pawnbroker was busy just then, so I left one of my aids to wait with him until his work was done, while I ran in and waited with you, but Levi will be here in a few minutes."

"Shall you take his word in the matter?"

"Yes. His sort are a keen lot."

"Then, if he picks out a man he will soon be hauled off to jail."

"I shall have him at Police Headquarters in a very short time."

"Just so."

Ben spoke absently. He had got to face Levi, and two things ought to be done first—the box must be got out of sight, and, if he could make any change in his appearance it must be done.

The Man from Montana took another

look at the box and then prepared for the first venture.

"Do you notice that picture on the wall, Mr. Charleston?" he asked.

"Yes. Quite a novelty to see a picture in such a place."

"Not bad, either."

"No. A pleasant little rural scene."

"Notice the color of the leaves on that tree. They seem quite lifelike, if you get the right light on them."

Still looking at the picture, Ben rose and moved off a few paces. His course took him nearer to the box.

"Very good, I should say, though I am not an artist. Hark! A step sounds in the hall. I guess Pittson Levi has come!"

CHAPTER XXV.

UNDER THE PAWNBROKER'S EYES.

There was a step in the hall, but the person who was moving there passed by and Benjamin Richardson had a reprieve. As the imaginary danger faded he turned his attention to substantial matters. He cared nothing for the picture on the wall, but it was necessary to keep the detective's attention fixed upon it until he could do the work in hand.

"Do you see," he pursued, "that rock to the left of the painting? Now, that reminds me of a rock out near my own home. See the crevices that seam its side?"

"Yes."

"If I can get the right light—"

The miner moved again, and gained a position by the table. Charleston looked fixedly at the painting. The chance was open, and Ben deftly slipped the box into his pocket.

"Have you got it?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

The question had referred to "the light," but Ben's answer referred to something very different.

"I get a good view here," added Charleston. "The picture is a pleasant little painting. I take it, Mr. Richardson, that you have an eye for artistic things."

"So I have. Out in Black Butte Hills we have scenery that would make your mouth water. Glorious Shagbark! Beautiful city of the future! Gem of the mountains and fountain of joy! I feel just like hurrahing!" and Miner Ben slapped the pocket into which he had slid the box and felt all he claimed. He had won one round in the battle.

"You like your adopted town, I see."

"I do. There is nothing like it this way, if I may say so with modesty. Why, here I don't know how to dress to keep comfortable. I am not comfortable now, and I believe I will put on a thicker suit. Will you excuse me?"

"Certainly."

Talking busily, the miner acted with equal celerity. He took off the coarse, sack coat he had worn, and replaced it with a Prince Albert of immaculate black that he had lately purchased. Next he discarded his slouched hat and donned a black silk "stove-pipe." As a last move, he applied a comb to his mustache, which had been drawn out in two points on a line with his mouth, and brought it down so that it covered his mouth wholly, and swept his chin.

The change was remarkable, and he really looked like a different man. Detective Charleston noticed it, but he had found the miner eccentric before, and he neither made any comment, nor thought the affair deserving of thought of serious nature.

Ben gained a look at himself in the glass and believed he had made the heaviest possible bid to baffle Pittson Levi's eyes.

"The rest must be extemporaneous," he thought. "When I was talking with the pawnbroker I suppose I looked as ugly as a pirate—I tried to, anyhow—and this trip I will be as smiling as a bride."

There were a few more minutes of inconsequential conversation, and then footsteps again sounded in the hall. This

time there was a knock at the door, and when Ben called out "Come in!" two men appeared. One was Irad Charleston's detective associate, and the other was Pittson Levi, the pawnbroker.

Ben did not forget his lesson, and he assumed a broad smile that made him look almost as if ready to burst into a laugh.

"Hallo, Stackwell," was Irad's greeting. "I see you have got around. This is my friend, Mr. Richardson."

He waved his hand to the Man from Montana, who nodded and smiled his widest smile. Without looking directly at Levi he managed to see him secretly, but there was no trace of recognition.

Stackwell, acknowledging the introduction, asked:

"Everything ready?"

"Yes. We will get to business at once."

Charleston rose; then the party filed down to the clerk's office. Ben kept as much out of the pawnbroker's view as possible, but also hovered near to Irad, so as to impress upon Levi the fact that he was a personal friend of the chief detective.

To the clerk their business was made known in part. He did not like to have it intimated that his hotel was sheltering a criminal, but the quickest way of settling it was to see if it was so, and he gave his aid.

First of all, they went to the reading room, and Levi had chance to look that party over. He found nobody that looked like his late visitor to the pawnshop.

Half a dozen guests were in their rooms. The clerk was very reluctant to let any of them know he was to be looked at as a criminal, so he devised a simple artifice for seeing into each room, and all were put under survey without revealing the object.

"That's all we have here," announced the clerk. "As chance would have it, no guest is out. You have seen them all."

"Well, Mr. Levi," asked Irad, "what do you say?"

"I have not seen the man," admitted the pawnbroker.

"Are you sure you ever saw him?" irritably asked Irad.

"It is as I have said, sir."

"Do you clear all here?"

"I have not seen the man named."

"Would you know him again, sure?"

"I should know him in California."

"Are you positive that I don't look like him?" asked the clerk, beginning to get into better spirits.

"Not at all like, sir."

Detective Charleston smiled, turned, and clapped his hand on Benjamin's shoulder.

"How about this man?" he playfully asked.

He enjoyed his joke, but Ben did not. The attention he had been so anxious to avoid was drawn directly toward him. He smiled until his mouth seemed in danger of getting out of shape permanently, but met Levi's gaze boldly.

The pawnbroker had been almost indifferent when he turned, but, as he looked, a peculiar expression came to his face. He gazed hard and a puzzled manner came over him.

It was the crisis with Ben Richardson. Levi's gaze was fully on him, and, despite Ben's artifices, the pawnbroker did see a resemblance. If he made full recognition not even Irad's good will could save the Man from Black Butte Hills.

Levi's gaze left Ben's face. It took in the tall hat and Prince Albert coat. They were not familiar. It returned to his face. The subject of scrutiny smiled his sunniest smile, but his hopes were low, and he could feel his heart thumping away unnaturally.

"There is some resemblance," murmured the pawnbroker, slowly.

"Why, of course!" added Irad, laughing. "The truth is, Mr. Levi, this is your man. I arrested him a bit ago, and I wanted to see if you would know him."

It was a joke from the genial detect-

ive, but, to Ben, a more untimely one could not have been devised. It was a great strain upon him, but he did his best. Summoning all his nerve he shook himself as if with mirth hardly to be controlled.

That trick worked well, and when Levi raised his puzzled gaze to Charleston's face and saw him laughing, too, he suddenly took on a resentful manner.

"You make sport of me, gentlemen!" he exclaimed.

"Don't you believe me?" inquired Irad.

The pawnbroker turned away irritably.

"This is not the man!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Ben, and there was really some amusement in the laugh.

"I am not here to trifle," added Levi.

"Excuse me, Mr. Levi. We did not intend to offend. The gentleman is a personal friend of mine, and the joke was on him—perhaps a trifle on me, too," remarked Irad.

"I think it was," meaningly coincided Ben.

Levi was appeased. He condescended to smile.

"It is all right, gentlemen. I like a joke, myself. I am only sorry that I have been of so little use to you."

"Possibly we shall need you again."

"Then you have only to call on me. I should like," added the pawnbroker, digging his fingers into his stubby beard, "to catch the fellow who took that plush box out of my place of business."

"That may come later. Well, we will go now. Mr. Richardson, I will see you again."

Pittson Levi's gaze wandered again to Benjamin, and again the puzzled expression came to his face. He seemed to forget where he was, and it was not until Charleston, receding, called to him that he aroused and followed after.

Down the hall went the party, and the miner was left alone. As soon as they were out of sight he retreated to his own room. There he wiped the gathering perspiration from his forehead and breathed hard.

"A close call, by George! Levi would have had me had not Charleston made it so plain that he was joking. Disguised as I was, the old pawnbroker was within an ace of the truth, and I played in big luck. Well, one more storm weathered. But is the danger over? This will dwell in Levi's mind, and, with me out of sight, he may grow suspicious. I'm afraid that fellow will make trouble yet!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

GARDNER IN A NEW ROLE.

For awhile Benjamin devoted his time to gloomy thought, but he finally remembered something which made him feel more cheerful. The next morning he was to meet Albert Charleston in a duel, and, if his opponent was a reasonably good shot, there would be no need of worrying about what Pittson Levi might do.

The miner sat down to his table and wrote a few letters. One was to his friend at Shagbark, upon whom he relied for a proper burial place. He plainly described where he wanted the grave to be, and, when he was done, he brightened up greatly.

"He will see that all is done as I direct. He always was a good fellow, and he won't fail me now. I wonder if Lezel Charleston will ever give me a pleasant thought? It doesn't matter much. She isn't of the same sort that I am, and I don't want her to care for me, but she is a fine woman, just the same."

By the time that everything was done it was near night. Ben had his supper, and then went out for a walk. He had a vague idea of keeping his eyes open for discoveries, but there was no system to his purpose.

He pursued his way through the humblest part of the city, and, two or three

times, stopped to give small coins to poverty-stricken children who pleased his eye.

"I shall not need money after to-morrow morning," he thought, "and they will need it as long as they live. Need goes hand in hand with the denizens of this district, and want joggles their elbows at every turn. The rich man hugs his cash and lays up earthly stores for somebody else to squander. Why can't he do good to his fellow men as he goes along, and thus get credit in the next world?"

These philosophical meditations were abruptly ended as a man came out of an alley and thus arrived face to face with Benjamin. The two looked at each other and then mutually smiled.

"Hallo!" quoth the miner.

"Good-evening, sir!" was the polite response.

The second man was Edmund Gardner.

"Been changing your place of residence?" asked Ben, facetiously, looking at the miserable alley from which his companion had come.

"I fear," answered the Englishman, appreciating the joke, "that I should find rent in there too much for me."

"It would probably be high."

"It is high in the wretched walls, and low in the dirty court. It is a place of rents, where Nature has seized upon things within reach and tried to tear them in two. Rents abound."

"I see you are still busy."

"My theory, my book, my work, call me there. I am quite busy, sir, and every journey I make to these abodes of poverty confirm my belief that poverty is the result of Nature's attempts to cast off the decaying branches of the tree of life."

Mr. Gardner was of interest to Benjamin. Even if the miner had taken his explanation as truthful he would have been so, for Gardner was too substantial and strong-minded to be adjudged an insipid theorist; but Ben had not forgotten his suspicions of the man.

Yet, if he was really a police agent, and on Ben's own track, what was he doing in the miserable alley?

A slovenly man approached from the other side of the street. He had no timidity, and he walked briskly up to Mr. Gardner.

"De goat's tracks don't show in dere, boss," he remarked.

"Have you found nothing?"

"Not a sign. I went t'rough de lane, an' I asked dem did they know of de goat, an' dey said dere was no such duck dere. Dey all said ef dere was anyt'ing inter it dey was willin' ter be de goat. See?"

"Quite plain."

"I guess this ain't de place you's lookin' fer, boss. You kin go in yer-self, ef you's want ter, but dey is a sassy gang in dere. Dey asked me ef I was a law-an'-order sassacity. Me!" added the man, gazing at his rags and dirt, appreciatively.

"You have done your work well, and here is the pay for it. You can go now."

He handed over a coin, and the disreputable citizen walked off toward the nearest saloon.

"One of your canvassers, I take it," dryly observed Ben.

"I sometimes make use of these outcasts of life. They can do some of my work, and the pay I give is a help to them. It enables them to quench a troublesome thirst."

"Are you looking for a goat?"

"It was the man's own choice of term. I never used the word to him. It was his erratic fancy."

There was a manifest evasion in the reply. It was clear that the ragged man could be of no help to Mr. Gardner in compiling a book, so his part was mysterious. On the other hand, if Gardner was working up a case against Ben, he had him under his own eyes and need not send disreputable associates into dirty alleys to hunt for anything.

More and more of a puzzle became Edmund Gardner, Esquire, of the British Isles.

The lawyer did not seem in any haste. He stood still in the middle of the sidewalk and continued to express his views on the course of Nature. He was an interesting talker, if Ben did not follow him at all times, and he rolled off long sentences with great freedom.

The miner listened well, but it did not require that he should keep his gaze on Gardner at all times. He did not do this, and, as a result, he noticed other things that were occurring around them—the passage of an occasional patrolman, and oftener the going and coming of ragged dwellers in the neighborhood.

Presently a carriage appeared at the end of the block. This was so unusual that Ben watched it approach with some vague curiosity.

Nearer it came until abreast of them, and there the driver pulled up his horses, evidently in response to a word from somebody within.

The door of the vehicle was thrown open, and four men leaped out one after the other.

There were two surprising things in this—the haste with which they followed each other and the fact that all were masked.

Gardner, standing with his back to them, noticed nothing of their movements, but kept on talking rapidly. He was in the middle of an elaborate sentence when a cry of warning came from Ben.

"Look out!"

The masked men, without the slightest delay, had leaped toward the two persons on the sidewalk, and Ben quickly detected the fact that there was hostile purpose in their movements.

"Defend yourself!" he added.

It did not seem to be Gardner who was in danger, for all rushed upon Ben. A timid man might have been frightened by such an attack, but the miner had seen wild scenes in the West, and he knew just what to do now.

He placed his back to the wall of the house and threw up his arms properly. He was none too soon, for the assailants were at his face, and he again showed that he knew how to care for himself.

The foremost man received a blow that bowled him over neatly, and Ben recovered from his effort in time to meet the rest.

Skillfully he stopped the rush, but the odds were great, and he was soon hard pressed. Now and then he could get in a good blow, but most of his time had to be given to self-defense.

It was at this stage of affairs that a new element was introduced to the fray. Edmund Gardner had been a spectator, but he ceased to be inactive. Suddenly he moved forward, and, with a tremendous blow, knocked down the ruffian nearest to him.

"Avaunt, foul spirits!" he exclaimed, with righteous indignation. "Your reprehensible conduct deserves severest censure, and, by my sire who fought with William the Conqueror, I will give you the needed lesson! Here's at you, fellows! In this I see the most striking evidence I have yet gathered in my search, and I shall give you fellows a special chapter in my forthcoming book. In you I see ample proof that Nature seeks to cast off its decaying branches from the tree of life, and, by the name of the good queen! I will help Nature!"

The lawyer had not been idle while he talked, and his lusty blows had been rained in a torrent. Back and forth through the party he moved, hitting a man whenever he could, and between his efforts and those of Benjamin the victory was won.

One of the gang made for the carriage, and the rest followed in wild haste. All piled into the vehicle, and, as nobody tried to stop them, they were quickly carried off, bruised and bleeding, with the driver belaboring his horse to get all possible speed out of him.

Benjamin looked after them thoughtfully. Masks had fallen in the fight, and he had recognized Luke Haggerty as the leader, all the others having been of his sort.

It was plain to understand the meaning of everything.

The Larimore combination was bound to get Ben out of the way.

Presently the miner turned to Mr. Gardner. That gentleman was resting from his toil, but his face was still so full of righteous wrath that Ben broke into a loud laugh.

He seized Gardner's hand.

"Old man!" he cried, "you are a trump!"

"I see but one thing to regret," replied the lawyer.

"What?"

"Our pleasure was short-lived, and we made no arrangements for a future meeting. However, we have cast off the decaying branches."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WITH WEAPONS DRAWN.

The Montana Miner fanned himself with his hat, but Lawyer Gardner remained as cool as ice and full of professional interest in the case last under his consideration.

"You must have been a soldier," suggested Ben, admiringly.

"No, but I had an ancestor who fought with William the Conqueror. Blood will tell, they say."

"So it will with the men we hammered. They spilled some, and it will tell when they look at themselves tomorrow."

Mr. Gardner fumbled solicitously at his cravat, though it was still immaculate.

"These men must have desired our valuables," he returned.

"If so, they have gained nothing. We have lost only our time, and had some pleasure. Hallo! they seem to have left something here!"

Ben had cast his eyes down, and he saw a picture lying there. He picked it up and saw the likeness of a young and beautiful woman.

"Well, well!" he commented, "this is a queer thing for a footpad to carry!"

"So it would have been, if they had carried it. It so happens, however, that the picture is mine. It must have fallen from my pocket during our exercise."

"Indeed! I did not suspect you of a romantic disposition."

"Would you not admire a lady who looked like that?"

"She surely is beautiful, refined, and agreeable of face. I don't blame you for carrying it about."

"I carry it always."

"A countrywoman of yours?"

"Yes, and of noble blood. One of the best families of old England. You would be a villain, sir, to think any other country equal to your own. The same rule applies to me. England is my home, pride, hope and magnet. Its ladies are, in my view, the extreme of greatness, goodness and beauty."

"If all are like this one, I don't blame you for your words of praise."

Benjamin handed the picture back to its owner, and if he could not look upon the lawyer as a natural possessor of a lady's likeness under such condition, the Englishman's service rendered him safe from jests or unspoken mirth.

Presently they wandered on together, but Gardner still had business to attend to, he claimed, and they finally parted.

The lawyer walked off briskly.

"He grows in mystery!" murmured Ben, thoughtfully. "I don't understand him. He may be just what he says, but I don't believe it. He is a strictly practical man, and Quixotic exploration of the lower habitations do not seem in his line. However, I no longer regard him as a police agent. He sinks out of sight as a spy upon me, but becomes more of a mystery."

Ben kept on until he had tired of aimless walking, and then took a home-

ward course. He had nearly reached the hotel when he had another encounter. A voice called to him and he turned.

Roger Hanks, the night-watchman, was there.

"Good-evening!" he spoke.

"Oh! so it's you, is it?"

"It's me. I wanted to see you."

"Unlike the shows that gem the lordly Bowery I am on exhibition free."

"It's about our business, you know," explained the watchman.

"Our business? I didn't know we had any."

"Why, you know the woman you killed on the pier."

"Wrong! I never knew her, and I didn't kill her."

"You evade the point. I want to know if you are going to pay me anything."

"Not a cent, Roger!"

"Is your secret nothing to you?"

"I have no secret."

"Well, I have, and it concerns you most of all. The question is, will you pay me to keep still, or shall I go to the police?"

"Go to them! Maybe they can supply a cell for you. You deserve it. I will recommend you."

"Now, see here, this won't do. You don't want this matter to come out. I have made a square, honorable proposition to you. Will you accept it and be safe, or shall I ruin you? Be serious!"

"Roger, I will. Your charge against me is a lie! I have pushed nobody off of the pier; I have harmed nobody. You seek to blackmail me. I won't submit to it. Not one cent will I give you!"

"This ain't fair. I have lost to-night off just to see you. Am I to lose my salary thus?"

"It looks to me just that way. I advise you to stick to your job, for you will never get a red from me. Blackmail I won't submit to. Ketch on?"

Hanks had been making a plain effort to keep cool and be persuasive, but he now waxed angry and ugly.

"Then I will land you in a cell!" he cried.

"Go ahead!"

Ben was calmly defiant. He remembered his prospective duel with Albert Charleston, and thought that it would make little difference to him after the morrow was well under way.

"You are a fool!" declared Roger.

"My dear sir, I rather suspect you are right."

"Don't you think I will do as I say?"

"Yes."

"And you defy the cell?"

"Just so!"

"Have you no regard for your reputation?"

"Not enough to make it a marketable article."

"I will go to the police! I will tell them you killed the woman! I'll brand you as black as I can!"

"All right!"

Roger Hanks looked bewildered. The total indifference of his companion he could not understand. He liked liberty and life, but it seemed Ben did not. He stood in silence and looked at his companion in a bewildered manner.

"This is queer!" he muttered.

"Now, don't get yourself into a brain fever by worrying over me. Yonder is a policeman. Call him!"

"But if I do you won't pay me any money."

"That's about correct."

"I will give you one more chance," decided the watchman. "To-morrow I will call on you and have this straightened out. Think it over! Consider how much better it will be to act reasonable. Pay me a little money and it will help me, and you will be free from worry. I am an honest man, and I want to do what is right. Still, I am in dead earnest. If you don't pay me to keep silent I will send you to the hands of the law. I mean it!"

"All right, Roger."

Hanks was backing off. He kept his gaze still on Ben, and there was bewil-

derment in it, but he finally turned, uttering a strange sound of mental disturbance, and walked rapidly away.

The Man from Montana smiled.

"I always have pitied a man who had to die," he murmured, "but I now see that even they have much to console them. Hanks scared me blue when he first came around. This time he didn't make a feather rise on my back. Why need I fear him? In the morning Al Charleston will shoot me, and I have no heirs to weep over my uncommitted sins. Go on your way, Roger! I have no cash for you—and no fear. How lucky it is I am to be shot to-morrow!"

With such consoling thoughts he went home and retired.

For once he was slow about falling asleep, but he finally dropped off and had a restful night.

The hour set for the duel demanded that he rise early, and he did not fail to meet the requirements. Getting in motion he dressed, left the hotel and took his way to Weehawken Ferry. Albert was already there, and Ben walked up to him briskly and held out his hand. "Good-morning!" he pleasantly exclaimed.

Albert looked at the proffered hand with cold disdain.

"Good-morning!" he replied stiffly.

"All ready?" asked the miner.

"Certainly."

"Then you really insist upon fight?"

"Certainly," again. "I absolutely refuse to settle this in any other way!" added Albert, severely. "One of us must die; it is a duel to the death."

"It will be you, then; never doubt that."

"Wrong! I shall drop you to stay! But the boat is ready," added Charleston. "Come on!"

They entered the ferry-house.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DUEL.

In a few minutes the duelists were crossing the river. The Montana Man had deliberately sat down by Albert's side, and he was so sociable that none of their fellow passengers had the slightest idea of the serious work under consideration.

Young Charleston evidently had no taste for conversation, but Ben rattled on rapidly, talking of about everything except what was important, and seeming to be as sunny-minded as the day was bright.

In due time the ferry-boat reached the Jersey shore, and the two men landed at Weehawken.

Albert was well acquainted with the locality, and he hastened to lead the way to a suitable spot for the duel. It was found in a place where grass, trees and flowers showed, and the miner could find no fault.

"We want to lose no time," declared Albert.

"That's right. Let's hurry it up. How many paces are we to stand apart?"

"I know nothing of such things. Here is a tree, and yonder is another. Suppose you stand by one and I by the other."

"All right, but the man who would miss at that distance ought to be shot twice. Two good duelists would each hit a nail at the distance."

"Does your courage waver?" asked Albert, sharply.

"Not an atom."

"Then the positions are all right."

"I agree with you."

"What signal shall we have for firing?"

"Suppose you count, 'One, two, three, fire!' and at the last word we pop away."

"That will suit me."

"What's the calibre of your revolver?"

"I don't know."

"Let me have a look at it. Ah! that's a forty-one—same as mine. Now, Al, if you drop me, there is a simple device by which all future trouble may be pre-

vented. Just lay my own revolver by my side, close to my right hand, and that will make it look as if I committed suicide. It will keep the police from nosing around too much. See?"

"Yes, yes! What do I care for these idle preliminaries? Let us to business!"

"All right! Here goes!"

They took positions. Benjamin Richardson swept one glance around him. He noted the beauty of the morning, and drank in the fresh air with a grateful sense and appreciation.

"This is a pleasant world!" he murmured to himself, with a momentary regret, but there was no weakening of his purpose. He looked at Albert. The latter was very pale, yet was free from tremor.

"Ready?" asked Charleston.

"Yes. Count!"

Albert obeyed. With a firm voice he pronounced the momentous words that were to serve as a preliminary:

"One!"

The revolvers were raised.

"Two!"

The weapons became stationary.

"Three!"

The duelists took aim.

"Fire!"

Two revolvers cracked almost simultaneously. Two bullets sped on their way, but the result was surprising.

Both duelists remained standing firmly.

More surprising yet, the right hand of each had been pointing straight upward when the shots were fired, and the bullets had gone skyward! Slowly the hands sunk, and there was amazement on both faces.

"Why, man, you fired into the air!" cried Ben.

"And so did you!"

"That's right!"

"Why did you do it? Man, would you play with me? You have insulted me afresh!" sharply cried Albert.

"Insulted you?"

"I am not here to play boy's games. How dared you fire in the air? Bring up your revolver again! Look at me! Here I am! Shoot!"

Young Charleston held his arms wide apart and invited the deadly bullet. His own hand was holding the weapon at right angles with Ben's position.

"This is queer!" asserted the Man from Montana. "I came here to fight a duel, and not to bombard the sky. Why didn't you shoot at me?"

"It matters not," sullenly answered Albert. "It seems we have made a flunk. We will fire again."

"Not if I know it!" declared the miner, who was over his surprise. "I see certain things that I didn't see before. We came here with a like purpose—not to shoot each other, but to be shot. I did, and you did. Now, we should be fools to keep that sort of thing up."

"I demand another shot."

"I shall shoot into the air!"

"No! You will shoot at me!"

"That's where you are in error. I shall not shoot again, either into the air or elsewhere."

And Ben, as he spoke, left his position and advanced rapidly toward his companion. The movement might have been hostile, but Albert gave no sign of apprehension. He waited with perfect calmness. Right to his side stepped the Man from Black Butte Hills, and then he laid his hand on Charleston's arm.

"Young man!" he spoke seriously, "do you want to die as badly as that?"

A tremor passed over the second duelist's face.

"Yes!" he huskily replied.

"Is life nothing to you?"

"Only a nightmare."

"Remember your father and sister!"

"I do remember them. But for them I should not be here."

"What had they to do with it?"

"Their honor and happiness were at stake."

"And did these things demand that you die?"

"They did."

"Al, you are in a bad way. What's up with you?"

There was genuine sympathy in the question, and Charleston's head drooped. His lips quivered with emotion, but he was silent.

"There must be some great trouble hanging over you, if you feel that way," added Ben. "What is it? Can I help you?"

Albert shook his head, but was silent.

"If I can, I am at your service," pursued Ben. "I will do what I can, and two pairs of hands and two heads are better than one. Yes, I'll do what I can, though you did shoot me out in Shagbark."

Charleston raised his head suddenly.

"I never did anything of the sort!" he exclaimed earnestly. "You are wholly wrong in suspecting me. I have said so all along. You ought to believe me now; I never was in the Black Butte Hills in my life."

"You were out West; you said so."

"I did say so, but not truthfully. I never was west of Chicago in my life, and it is five years since I was there."

"Then why the dickens did you say you were out West last summer?"

Albert was silent, and his troubled expression did not pass unnoticed by the other.

"I think I begin to grasp this a little," assumed the miner. "All this Western trip was a device. Your father thinks you went there. I reckon you deceived him."

"I did, I did! Heaven help me, I did—and now I am reaping the consequences of my folly!" exclaimed Albert, with deep feeling.

"Tell me about it. Confide in me, and maybe I can give you a lift."

"Impossible! I am in trouble from which only death can release me. I came here with you, forcing you to renew thoughts of the duel when you had plainly weakened in your purpose, and all because I believed you would—shoot straight and end it all!"

"Young man, this is an occasion when you need a friend. Give me a chance to help you, and I will do it. Without a word I accept your statement that you were not in Shagbark. Somehow, there was a mistake of identity about that. Now, what's your trouble?"

Albert shook his head.

"Tell me," urged Ben, "and let me deal with Kelma Downing."

Charleston started back.

"What—what?" he cried in alarm.

"You see I am onto your secret. That woman has you by the throat. She is an adventuress. She has been worrying the life out of you, and you have allowed her to do it. That must stop. Brace up! Defy her!"

"Impossible!" groaned the wretched man.

"We will work together. Why, I am a whole team when I get in motion, I am! What's the secret? Out with it!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DANGEROUS VISITOR.

The Montana Man spoke with hearty good will, but Albert was not so ready to reply. He kept silence until the miner renewed his insistence.

"It must be unpleasant to have such a thing hanging over a fellow—I have had some things to trouble me before now—but there is no designing woman but can be beaten if one goes to work right. Honor, family, position, and resolution can beat the best of them, I say."

Albert gave one of the gloomy shakes of his head that had marked the whole interview.

"Now," pursued Ben, "what is the nature of the hold she has upon you? Is she your wife?"

"Heaven pity me! she is!"

"Just so. Now we begin to get at it. You fell in love with her, your young blood was warm, and your heart—well, it was very young, too! so off you went and married her. Break off with her! Defy

her! If she gets ugly, fight it out! I say, *defy her!*"

"Impossible! Kelma has me by the throat."

"You want to keep this from your father?"

"Yes."

"Wrong! Old heads are better than young ones in emergencies. Irad Charleston is old wise, experienced, and a devoted father. Tell him all; he will help you out."

"You don't understand. I would not tell him for the world."

"Getting married isn't a crime."

"Other things are."

"Oh! so the wind blows *that way!*"

Ben's brow contracted. He recalled certain things he had heard before. He had heard Kelma talk to Albert on the street when the shed gave Ben himself a hiding place. She had boasted of her power over Albert, and referred to certain things not named that, she asserted, would ruin Albert if made public.

"This mad young man," thought the miner, "has gone into one of the gang's schemes with them. He fears not only Kelma Downing, but the law. Whew! It is pretty serious!"

Ben had not the right nature to be long cast down, and he rallied and talked further in a friendly way.

Failing to get Albert's confidence he tried to encourage him, and convince him that the plots of Kelma and Willis Larimore could be baffled and the gang defeated wholly.

He did not succeed. His companion persisted that there was no hope, and his expression told that he meant it.

Time was wearing on, and Charleston finally aroused somewhat and said that he would go home. They crossed the ferry together.

The Man from Montana had decided to accept Albert's statement that he never had been in Shagbark, mysterious as this left the Shagbark case; and with the abatement of his vendetta he began to feel deep interest in Albert and desire to give him aid.

More, he was not sure that Albert was to be trusted alone. He had tried to throw away his life that morning, and as the effort had failed, other means might be taken. The miner thought there was danger of self-destruction.

In this emergency it was necessary that somebody should keep in his company, and he proposed that they go to the Charleston house together. He expected opposition, but, to his relief, the young man agreed without hesitation.

A car was taken, and they went at once.

It was a different home-coming from what Albert had looked forward to, but his brow was dark as he fitted a key and opened the front door. He and Ben had settled their differences for the time being, but his chief trouble must be taken up again.

"Come into the parlor!" directed the detective's son.

The door was closed. He opened it, as there was no sound of voices within, and then pushed forward, with Ben at his heels. A few steps they took, then the leader halted so suddenly that Ben almost collided with him.

An audible gasp sounded from Albert's lips.

Two persons were in the room—Irad Charleston and Kelma Downing!

The miner could take in a good deal at one glance, and did so now. He saw that Kelma was self-contained and at her ease, while the detective was pale and worried of look.

"She has been springing the mine!" thought Ben.

Kelma seemed uncertain what to do for a moment, but she quickly recovered her ideas and a malicious smile crossed her face.

"Here is the dear laddie to answer for himself, now!" she cried, with a most offensive manner. "Now let us see if he will defy me."

There was a period of silence. The

parties all looked at each other in a way that indicated the seriousness of the situation. Only Ben Richardson had the coolness to take up the conversation, but his proper course then was to remain quiet.

Albert shifted his gaze from Kelma to his father, deep distress stamped on his face. He saw how bitter a shock the detective had received.

It fell to Kelma to break the silence.

"Well," she exclaimed, "have you all turned to stone?"

Irad Charleston was in sorrow, but he was not weak of nature. He rose and confronted his son.

"Albert," he spoke, "do you know this woman?"

"Lady, sir," snapped Kelma.

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, dear laddie," cried the adventuress, "do you know me?"

She was scarcely heeded. Father and son looked only at each other.

"I have seen her," admitted Albert.

"When?—where?"

"In this city—sometimes!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Kelma, mockingly.

"She has made claims to-day that are startling. I will repeat them. If they are untrue, I wish you to deny them. If they are true—"

The detective stopped short, and Kelma sneered again.

"What has she told you?" asked Albert.

"That she is your wife!"

The younger man's head drooped with a helpless air.

"Is it true?" pursued the detective.

There was no reply. Albert looked at the floor and kept his lips closed.

"I am answered," added Irad Charleston, a great weight seeming to fall upon him. "I have my answer, yet I can hardly believe it yet. I would like to know more of this affair—more than she has told."

"It is the old, old story!" cried Kelma, with a light laugh. "Do you remember that your son fell into the habit of taking a horse-back ride in the Park every morning before breakfast? During these rides he saw another rider—a woman—who pleased his eye. He made her acquaintance."

"And that was you?" asked Irad.

"He had been dazzled by her. He thought her beautiful, brilliant, charming, brave and wonderful. He thought this, I know, because he told her so—after the fashion of men."

"And then?"

"He married her."

"I understand, Albert," added the detective, "this woman has come here to make a singular demand. She admits that she is one of the band led by Willis Larimore—a law-breaker of some renown—and she demands that I call my men off of the trail of the gang, and myself let them alone. She states what she will do if I refuse. Do you know what it is?"

Albert made answer only with a hopeless gesture.

"She threatens to reveal all she can and ruin you. She will tell that she is your wife—"

"And more!" put in Kelma.

"What the rest is she has not yet told. She declares, however, that you are fully in her power; that she can ruin you."

"So I can."

"Albert, my son, deny this!"

The wretched young man was still silent. He knew he could say nothing that would do anybody good, and he did not try.

"You see how it is," triumphantly observed the adventuress. "We shall have no rebellion here. Our good Albert knows he cannot escape the lash, so he doesn't make any bluff. That is a mark in his favor. Now, see how easy it is to settle this forever. I don't want to hurt my dear husband, and I will not if you will be reasonable. Let Willis Larimore's party alone, and I will let your son alone. Annoy us, and I ruin—mark you, ruin!—Albert Charleston!"

"My son," continued Irad, still ignoring the woman, "the visitor has said by intimation, rather than direct words, that you have been an ally of the band, and consequently have put yourself into their power. Is this true?"

"I am afraid it is," admitted Albert.

"You—you an ally of law-breakers?" exclaimed the detective, his voice rising to a strange pitch of grief. "Oh! my son, my son!"

The younger man moved impetuously forward.

"Listen to me!" he cried, excitedly. "I am not all black. Listen!"

CHAPTER XXX.

DANGER FOR BEN.

Every eye was fixed upon the detective's son. It seemed that the secret was to be told, and, if it was, there would be a radical change, and the fight against Kelma Downing would be an open one.

"I did marry her," Albert confessed. "I was infatuated—fool that I was. I married her! I can now see that I fell into a trap; it has as good as been admitted to me. The gang took advantage of my madness and brought me into the net as a means of protection to themselves."

Kelma rocked composedly.

"Oh! that our foresight was as keen as our hindsight!" she sneered.

"As to this thing that she says was an association with the gang in its plots and lawless work, her claim is at once a lie and the truth. I never went into any scheme knowingly, but I was led on blindly, and—pity me, but I am in their snare!"

"What did you do?" asked Irad, with pity and patient persistence.

"That had best be left untold. If she has not revealed the secret, it is better for all concerned that it be left untold."

"Then you will remain in her power."

"Yes."

"Don't do that! Throw off the yoke! Fight it out!"

"He dares not!" exclaimed the adventuress.

"It is better so," replied Albert. "Let us make a truce. I wish you to drop your crusade against Larimore's men, and—give me peace, rest, hope for the future."

"Didn't I tell you?" mocked Kelma.

"He knows when to make terms."

"Speak!" pursued the detective. "This woman must be disposed of, and at once. Do not let any false sentiment stand in the way. We cannot fight a foe on in the dark. Tell all! Let me know the worst, and then I will stand shoulder to shoulder with you and fight your battles to the end!"

"They cannot be fought," responded the son. "I know this case. It is better that nobody else should. You have not been directed by your superiors to take up the trail against the Larimore gang. I desire that you drop it."

"Wisely said!" declared Kelma.

The father was silent. He saw clearly that Albert was fixed in his opinion, and now he decided that it was best to take time. Ben Richardson was present, and, though he was supposed to be Albert's friend, the revelation should have few listeners.

A while he meditated; then he turned to the adventuress.

"You can go," he announced. "I will drop my crusade."

"Forever?" she asked.

"I will not say that."

"I demand the pledge."

"You will not get it!" asserted Irad, firmly.

"You are defiant."

"Why promise what would be folly? You cannot promise to take yourself forever out of my son's sight, and, if you did, your promise would be good for nothing. Be satisfied with what you have won. For the present I will let you alone. I shall promise no more."

Kelma scowled and seemed uncertain. She looked alternately at father and son, but she noted the firmness of Irad's voice

and was shrewd enough to make no mistake. She had received the promise for which she had come, and it was best to be satisfied for the time.

Hesitating briefly, she rose.

"Gentlemen," she remarked, "I will leave you now. Business requires that I hurry away. My dear Mr. Charleston, I beg that you will not think too harshly of me. I may have my peculiarities, but my heart is warm. You will find me a model daughter-in-law."

With a malicious smile playing over her face, she moved toward the door and vanished.

Ben Richardson, with a proper degree of delicacy, felt that the occasion was one where an outsider might be in the way.

"Gentlemen," he remarked, "if I am not needed now I will go, but, before I do so, let me say that if I can help you in any way I shall be very glad to do so. I know something about dealing with tough characters, and if you want to bluff that gang by force of muscle, or in any other manner, you have only to call on me. I am at your service. Let me hear from you if I am wanted."

He moved toward the door, but gave them a chance to reply. The detective did not fail to catch the sympathetic tone and appreciate it.

"We thank you, sir," he answered, "and your kindness will not be forgotten."

"Call me whenever you wish, gentlemen."

With this the miner passed out.

"Well, this looks serious," he mused as he walked up the block. "Al has got his head into a lovely sling, and he seems to be beat clean out. If I had nothing else to do I should just like to fight that gang for him. Maybe I can, anyhow! I reckon—queer as it seems—I reckon he was not the man who shot me at Shagbark. Queer!"

In deep thought he pursued his way, unconsciously moving toward his hotel.

He did not rouse until he reached the place. He wanted to be alone, so he avoided the main entrance and went in by a side door. To his own room he proceeded, and, once there, he threw down his hat.

"Now for a think!" he exclaimed. "I want to take an account of stock. I am a good deal puzzled by this series of complications, and it requires time to think it out. What's my best way to do?"

He sat down and took out a cigar. Like all old smokers he believed that his wits worked better with such help, and he was congratulating himself on a comfortable smoke when the door opened without warning.

A man entered, closed the door quickly, and then stood before Ben.

It was Edmund Gardner!

"Hallo!" exclaimed the miner, in surprise.

"How did you get past them?" demanded Gardner, hurriedly.

"Past who?" inquired Ben, still more surprised.

"The detectives."

"What detectives?"

"The ones who are after you."

"Well, I didn't know any were after me."

"They are watching for your return, and waiting to arrest you."

"Detectives are here and after me?"

"Yes, just that."

"Well, that's news to me. Who the dickens are they, and why are they after me?"

"To arrest you for pushing a woman from a pier into the river. So goes the statement."

"The dickens they are! Going to arrest me, eh? How? Why? That is, what the deuce does this all mean?"

"I know but little about it. I came to this hotel on my own business, and found the detectives here. It seems that a man has gone to the officers and accused you of pushing the woman, as before said."

"What man?"

"His name is Hanks—Roger Hanks, I think."

"Humph!"

Ben rose abruptly. He saw it all now. The previous night he had defied Hanks because he had thought the duel would end the night watchman's power of mischief. Roger had taken him at his word and revealed his identity.

The Man from Montana was flustered. All of his old fear of New York law revived. In imagination he saw himself dragged to prison to suffer for a crime he never had committed, and with no hope of proving his innocence.

Edmund Gardner had been watching him closely.

"They say you did it," added the Englishman. "Did you?"

"No! A thousand times no!"

"Sir, I have known you but a short time, but you have impressed me as being an honest man. Tell me why the fellow has said this of you now?"

"At the beginning he was mistaken. Then he tried to blackmail me and failed. When he saw he couldn't do it, he told this yarn out of revenge."

"Will you swear you are innocent?"

"I will—I do!"

"Then, by the queen! I wish I could help you!" declared Gardner. "I am a law-abiding man and a lawyer, but I have a heart. Can't we get you clear? What ill luck sent you into this hotel now? They are watching down-stairs for your return—how are you to escape?"

"I came in by the side-door; maybe I can slide out the same way."

"It is worth trying. I saw you enter this room and followed to warn you. It is done. You must flee!"

"I'll go at once. I reckon I can—"

"Ha! there are footsteps outside the door! They approach! It is likely the detectives are coming to look in."

Gardner caught Ben's arm nervously.

"Too late!" he added. "They come!—you are lost!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PERILOUS VENTURE.

Edmund Gardner was excited, but Ben had the ability to rise to the emergency in moments of peril. Seizing the lawyer by the arm, he dragged him across the room. There was a second door to the room, but Gardner did not know whither it led until Ben threw it open and pulled him into the recess beyond.

It was a closet.

The Man from Montana closed the door.

"This is a reprieve, at least," he remarked.

Footsteps sounded in the room, and Ben-Claim Ben peered through a crevice. Two professional-looking men had appeared. They were standing still and looking around.

"Not here yet," observed one.

"How should he be? We have watched below so that not even a cat could pass us; now we have put a guard at the side-door, too."

"That's correct, but criminals have a mysterious way of getting about, at times."

"When this Ben Richardson comes we shall probably have a rough scrap with him. He is represented as a desperate fellow."

"Do you think Irad Charleston will approve of our proceeding as we have?"

"Why not? True, he knew Richardson somewhat, but he does not know of Roger Hanks's story. That places things on a different footing, and he surely will approve of our promptness."

"Singular that Charleston hasn't come around this morning, as he promised, but I suppose he has something to occupy his attention. We shall surprise him when he does come."

"Richardson has not been nabbed yet."

"He will return sooner or later, and when he does come we will get him fast enough. That will settle the question as

to who pushed Mrs. Snow off of the pier."

"Yes. We had better go down now. We don't want the fellow to come in unseen, or furnish any possibility of escape."

"That's so. Out we go."

They went, closing the door after them. Benjamin and Gardner, in the closet, had been standing in utter silence. Now the Englishman touched the miner's arm.

"You see your danger," he remarked.

"What shall you do?"

"Frankly, I don't know."

"Surrender?"

"Peaks of the Black Butte Hills, no! Do you think I will? Not much! I am innocent, and I don't want to be made a chopping-block for the New York police." "Then you must get out of this hotel. How?"

"That remains to be seen."

Stepping out into the room, and going to the window, Ben looked out. He had known before that the window opened into an alley. He had a vague idea of the distance, but wanted clearer proof. He looked down.

"I think I can jump it," he observed.

"Why, man, the fall will kill you!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"It will shake me up some."

"The plan is impossible. You don't want to break all your bones in such a desperate venture."

"Is it any more desperate than to stay here and let those detectives yank me off to a cell? I reckon not, and, as I don't see any other way, I am going to make the jump!"

"You are mad!"

"Well, Mr. Gardner, I am going to jump anyhow. I don't hanker to get caught up by the scruff of the neck for something I didn't do. I'm going, but where shall I make for when I am out of this?"

"Have you no refuge to which you can go?"

"No."

"I think I can suggest one."

"Pardner, if you can mention a den where I can rest the sole of my foot while the trouble is on, I shall be your devoted slave."

"I can suggest just what you want. It's queer business for me. In England I have always had a great contempt for a lawyer who took criminal cases. What would the men who do this say if they knew of me—me!—actually helping an alleged criminal to escape? Truly, adversity makes strange bed-fellows!"

While talking the Englishman had been writing on a card. He now handed it to the Man from Montana, adding:

"If you escape alive, go to that address. I do not think you will have to go alone. I am going to leave myself, and, if you get away alive, I shall try to escort you, but go to the address anyhow."

"Old man, you are a trump!" averred the miner.

"Possibly I am a fool! I am doing what I would a few days ago have declared an impossibility for an honest man to do. The die is cast; I will aid you all I can."

"You are a man fit for Shagbark, by George! I like your style. Now, I jump! Good-day, pard!"

Ben held out his hand, and a mutual clasp was exchanged. Then the miner went again to the window. He was strong and hardy, and, though the leap was very hazardous, he would take it. He swung himself outward and began to lower himself as far as possible.

"Sure death!" thought Gardner.

He did not say anything to make his companion's courage waver, and the adventurer lowered himself from the window sill to the full length of his arms. In this position, hanging by main strength, he looked up at Gardner.

"There is a cigar on the table," he remarked. "Take it, and, if I get smashed up, smoke it yourself. So-long!"

He released his hold.

The lawyer watched with fast-beating

heart. He saw Ben shoot downward, and the distance seemed to grow greater than ever. Down, down!—to what?

Ben struck the earth. He alighted on his feet; then bounded upward a little, like a ball, and then collapsed and fell prostrate.

"Killed!" breathed Gardner. "But no!—he is up again! What? Is it possible?"

Gaining his feet, Benjamin looked upward and waved his hand. Then, with a glance toward the street, he moved away rapidly.

One question remained to be solved, and that was whether any of the detective party was on guard outside the house. The alley opened into a street only a few paces from the front door of the hotel, and Ben was not unmindful of the continuance of danger.

He had escaped without perceptible injury, and he walked forward to the final test.

He reached the sidewalk. Once there he sent a quick glance to his right. A big man, who had all of the aspect of an officer, stood there. This person turned his gaze upon the miner, but the latter gave him no visible attention.

With deliberate movements he walked away in a different direction.

Every moment he expected to hear the sound of pursuing footsteps, but he went further and further from the hotel in perfect safety.

Not yet daring to look back, he continued the course, which was toward the refuge mentioned by Gardner. Presently he slackened his pace so as to let the lawyer overtake him, if all was going well, and, after a while, hurried footsteps were followed by the appearance of his ally.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Gardner.

"All right?"

"Yes, if it is with you."

"I am like a bounding buck of the buffalo wallows."

"No broken bones?"

"None, though I split the pavement of the alley where I struck."

"You are a wonder."

"Allow me to say, too, that there are no flies on you."

"The detectives did not have a suspicion. They are beaten in every way, and, if luck is with us still, we will keep you out of trouble."

"About this refuge of yours. I hope it is not a public hotel?"

"Not a bit of it. It's a den in the slums. It's a place of poverty, dirt, decay and desolation."

"Just the thing, but how came you to know of it?"

"I found it in my researches. I was looking for evidence that degeneration was the effort of Nature to throw off its diseased branches, and when I encountered this place, with its wretched people and squalor, I believed I had found what I wanted. Of course I was not going to let such a chance slip, and I made friends with the inmates of the house."

"And you think they will harbor me?" asked the miner.

"Yes."

"I will pay them well."

"They will take it."

"But suppose they surmise that I am a fugitive?"

"Oh! that won't do any harm."

"They may be reluctant to run contrary to law."

"Don't worry about that. They have been doing it all their lives, and nothing will shock them. They know how to fight the police, rob, burn, garrote and slay. All these things they have done, they admit. They would as soon kill a man as not."

The Man from Montana looked questioningly at Gardner, but the lawyer's face was perfectly serious.

"Well, by George!" exclaimed Ben; "you recommend the place highly! Very likely they will kill me, too. Never mind! Lead on! I'll go!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

Lawyer Gardner continued his way with the Montana Miner by his side until one of the lowest quarters of the city was reached. Then he turned into a narrow passage which led them to a court at the rear of the houses that lined the streets, but Ben was rather staggered when he saw the sort of place to which he had been conducted.

Buildings surrounded the court, some of which were of wood and others of brick, but all were wretched habitations, and all out of shape from old age and neglect. They leaned in varying directions, and looked as if a stiff wind would blow them to pieces utterly.

The court itself was a repository of filth of all sorts, and a person with a weak stomach would have sickened.

"Well, how does this strike you?" asked Gardner, triumphantly.

"It hits me hard!" confessed the miner.

"Isn't it a good refuge?"

"I cannot doubt it. It is easy to believe that no policeman has been in here since the good old Dutchmen gave up New York to the victors of the struggle for possession. How about the present population?"

"They are like the court. Could you ask for more?"

"Frankly, I couldn't. It is enough."

"We will enter now."

Into the largest of the brick houses Gardner made his way. He seemed to be perfectly at home, and gave no heed to the dirty inhabitants, old or young, that they met by the way. He proceeded to the second floor, and then opened a door without ceremony.

Before them was a room like all else in the vicinity, with a single occupant. It was a woman of more than middle age, but she was not the worst-looking thing there.

If she was not really clean, she was not painfully dirty, and Ben rather hailed the sight of her as an improvement.

"Mrs. Haggis," began Gardner, "I have called again. This time I will not force business upon you, but ask you to meet my friend, Mr. Jason Turk."

"Is he a decaying branch of the tree of life?" asked the woman, quickly, a cunning look on her face.

"He is one you can meet freely. More, I want you to board him for awhile."

"Humph! That's different!" and she did not seem so well pleased.

"He is in need."

Her sharp eyes studied Ben's countenance closely.

"Why?"

"To be plain, the police want him."

"Sometimes," Mrs. Haggis remarked, with a snifle, "the police have to be padded with cash to make them decent."

"I do not think it will be so now. Still, you shall be provided with the sinews of war. Here!"

He handed her a bank-note, and her good will was gained at once.

She and Gardner spoke together for some time longer, and all the while Ben stood in silence. He was amazed that Gardner should have brought him to such a place, and he mentally decided that he would not remain. If there was no better refuge to be found, he might as well go to a prison cell at once—it would be a relief.

He had fully decided upon this point when his roving gaze caught sight of something more. Poor as Mrs. Haggis was, she had made some crude efforts to brighten up her home, or efforts intended to accomplish that result.

Several pictures had been nailed to the walls. They were, without exception, gaudy advertisements of a business nature, but, to her, they doubtless were works of art.

From them his gaze wandered on until it took in a very different object. A cabinet photograph stood in a conspicuous place, and it gave Benjamin a surprise.

"Willis Larimore!" he thought, quickly.

Unless it was a case of remarkable resemblance, the picture was that of Larimore. In every way it was like him, and Ben, once aware of its presence, could hardly keep his eyes from it.

How did it happen to be there? He sought for an answer, and finally believed he had found it. In Mrs. Haggis's features he discovered a resemblance to Larimore. "Mother and son!" was his decision.

After all, it was not so surprising. The way that the dashing law-breaker had taken to make his living was as much open to the poor as the rich. He had taken that way, and, succeeding in crime, had outgrown his early surroundings.

At first Ben was uncertain how to take the discovery; but, as he meditated further, he was not so sure that he was in haste to leave. Something more might be learned of the leader of the gang, and, though he could not see that particularly valuable discoveries were likely to follow, it was worth attention.

Gardner did not seem disposed to linger a great while. He had talked Mrs. Haggis into the best of humor, and he felt sure of her aid and fidelity.

"I have business elsewhere," he finally observed, "and I shall have to leave you. My young friend I commit to your care."

"I'll stand by the lad well," she declared. "The man who has the cops after him is my friend, too, be he white, black, yellow or blue."

"Your sentiments do you honor."

"The police are vultures."

"And they seek lambs. True, true! Well, madam, I go to my duties now. Remember my words about the efforts of Nature to cast off its decaying branches—and remember my young friend, too. Benjamin, be of good cheer—I leave you with a true and noble woman who will stand between you and harm. Trust her, and all will be well."

The lawyer waved his hand and proceeded to retreat.

When he was gone, Ben devoted a little more time to wondering over the men. Gardner did not grow less of a mystery. His freedom with such a woman as Mrs. Haggis, and general hail-fellowship with her sort was perplexing.

He looked the typical English lawyer, but Ben was beginning to doubt that he was that. Perhaps he was a leader of city law-breakers, on a more general pattern than Willis Larimore.

Left to the woman's company, the Black Butte delegate tried to be sociable and impress her favorably, and, as he was so well recommended as a fugitive from the police, the task was not difficult.

They talked on for some time; then she noticed Ben's gaze stray to the photograph on the wall.

"Sure, ye're looking at the picture!" she exclaimed, a gratified expression coming to her face.

"So I am, madam. That's a fine thing."

"And me own son, to—me kid, me laddie!"

"I didn't suppose you had a son of that age."

"Oh! Well, I have all the same, and a bright lad he is, too. He don't need ter give any of them chance to sneeze when he's around. And to think that I raised him in this very house, with all its poverty and hard luck, and he got to be such a bonny lad now."

"Isn't he a Wall street man?"

"Pah!" exclaimed Mrs. Haggis, in disgust. "Do ye think he would stoop to that? Why, he has brains, he has! Does he need to operate in Wall street? Well, I guess not!"

"There is something in that," acquiesced Ben, assuming a thoughtful manner.

"He's the same that you are."

"That's pleasant."

"You should meet him."

"It would make me proud, madam."

"Still, if you do it, 'twill have to be by chance. When the lad was very young I gave him good advice. 'Don't get too chummy with men you don't need,' was my advice, and I says so now. Too many confidants ruin good games. He who lives by smiting the law should know few and trust fewer."

"I see you are a philosopher."

"I know a few things. I tell none of them. I tell the lad but little. If he came here this minute I should say nothing av you. Why? Could you win in a game of poker if you showed yer hand? Hardly! Go light! Keep yer secrets! Fly low! That's my advice."

"Wise, surely."

"The lad," added Mrs. Haggis, waving her hand toward the picture, "is a bonny lad. He rose from the slums to what he is. A noble lad!—a lad of brains. You should see him prove it. He has strange power over other men."

"The power of brains, eh?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the woman, eagerly. "You should see him prove it. Why, well do I remember—it was but a few days back—when he was here one fine morning. He read the paper, and something displeased him a good bit. He threw the paper on the floor, and then he leaped into the air and jumped on it time and again with his pretty patent-leather shoes."

"The power of brains!" thought Ben, but he was too wise to say it.

"He was in a rage, the lad was, but pretty soon he quieted down and sat sullen and still like he used to when a child, and I had licked him red. It was just then that another man—a creature of his—a person named Haggerty—came in. Then came the fun!"

"What happened then?" asked the miner.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BEN'S BAD NEIGHBORS.

Mrs. Haggis smiled a broad smile of complete satisfaction.

"Brains showed—brains showed!" she declared. "You should have seen my lad tame the brute who came—for Haggerty is only a brute, anyhow. The lad tamed him."

"I can well believe it," agreed Ben. "Your son has a fine head."

"When Haggerty came in my lad just scowled and said nothing. He was not mad with Haggerty, but he wasn't good-natured, either, ye see. Now, Mister Haggerty thought he had been doin' a big thing, and he jest stepped up to that table and slammed down a box onter it."

"A box?" questioned Ben.

"A plush box."

"Mr. Haggerty must be a dandy."

"No. He's as rough and coarse as a porcupine's back. But he was beamin' then, and he cried out:

"'Feast yer lamps on that!'

"'What is it?' says my lad.

"Haggerty threw the box open. We all seen a gold watch inside, and it did do me eyes good, and my lad, he looked sour.

"'Where did you get it?' he says.

"'A woman yielded it up,' says Haggerty.

"'So you've been breaking into somebody's house?' says the lad, sourly. 'Didn't I tel yez not to do that? Haven't we business enough to attend to elsewhere? Why do you mix into other things, you villain?'

"It was plain language, and the rough was taken aback. He hadn't the brains to meet eloquent logic such as the lad used, and he looked crestfallen and ugly.

"'I ain't broke into no house,' he says, sulkily. 'You jest listen an' I will show you that I have done no harm. I got that ticker on the street. I followed a woman to a lonely pier, and then I pounced onter her and seized the box. She won't never tell no tales, I reckon, for the morning papers do be saying she fell into the dock and was drowned, though I didn't see nothing of the sort.'

"Then up rose the lad, and I could see

his face was very white and his eyes gleaming like fire.

"'You!' he says, in a thick way—'you did that?—you?'

"'Yes, me,' says Haggerty.

"'You pushed her off?'

"'No,' says Haggerty, 'I jest took this ticker. If she fell into the drink, that was her hunt, not mine. I never suspected she fell.'

"'And it was you?—you?' grated my lad.

"'Sure, it was me.'

"'Oh! you fool, you dolt, you scoundrel!' hissed my lad, and I did think he would have an apoplexy, he was so mad with rage. 'You did it?—you?'

"By this time even thick-headed Haggerty could see that something was wrong, and he says in a scared way that he didn't know what the matter was.

"'Fool, fool!' says my lad, in a shout. 'You say you've seen the morning papers—have you seen no names?'

"'The paper I read didn't have none.'

"The lad snatched up the paper he had been jumping on just before Haggerty came in.

"'Look at this, you fool!' he says, hotly. 'Look, and then see the howling idiot you have made of yourself! Look and see how you have dashed our hopes down! Look! Read the name! Do you see who you have killed? Mrs. Snow! That's her name. Oh! you meddling fool!—you idiot, you scum!'

Mrs. Haggis had grown so excited over this story and its proof of her son's "brains" that she rose from her chair and acted it all out. She raged about the room and then, taking Ben as a model for the much-despised Haggerty, made a pantomime of showing him the article in the newspaper, shouting out her pretended rage very dramatically.

It was partly this, but more the words that were used that impressed Benjamin so much. He looked hard at her.

"Mrs. Snow!" he murmured.

"Yes. That's the person."

"And Haggerty—it was he who robbed her?"

"Yes. He said so, and he had the plush box with the lady's watch to prove it. He was the one."

"And your son—he had known of her?"

"Yes."

"In what way? What was he so angry over her death for?"

The questions were straightforward, and that recalled Mrs. Haggis to herself. Her expression changed and she shot a quick glance at Ben that was questioning and doubtful.

"Sure," she replied, "I suppose she was a friend of my lad's, but he never told me, and I make it a point never to ask questions about things that don't concern me."

Benjamin took the hint.

"Quite right, Mrs. Haggis," he responded. "Well, I am glad that your son squelched the insolent fellow he was dealing with."

"It was the power of brains."

"Nothing else, I should say."

"My lad has that power over other men, be they rich or poor, high or humble. There is few like him."

The miner was content to let her opinion go unchallenged, but he was sorry she had so little to tell. She had suddenly decided to say no more, and she stuck to her decision. Ben did not try to lead her on further, for she was plainly a stubborn woman, and it would not only do no good, but might hurt his chances.

A yawn on his part, later on, did not escape her notice.

"You're sleepy, lad," she remarked.

"Go take a nap. There is a good clean bed in the next room—my son's own—an' you can lay in it and sleep."

Ben liked the suggestion. Mrs. Haggis had grown monotonous when she ceased to tell stories, and, if he must remain in the den, he was willing to be alone.

He was conducted to the other room,

and he found that if everything was not to his taste, the bed, at least, was all she had claimed for it. She went out, and he lay down quietly.

"Things change!" he murmured. "I am now a fugitive from justice in the full sense of the word, and I am in a mighty queer hiding-place, too. I don't know what possessed Gardner to take me here, but he is strange in all his ways. He perplexes me more than ever. Why is he so thick with such cattle as these? Who and what is the man?"

The Montana Miner did not linger long on this conundrum.

"All my suspicions of Luke Haggerty are confirmed," he thought. "It was he who followed Mrs. Snow to the pier and robbed her. He was the man who was so distractedly complained of by her to me. I wonder where Willis Larimore comes in? He had known of her, and he was enraged when he learned of her death. Seems as if it nipped some scheme of his in the bud. He could hardly have been in her confidence, so it follows that he must have learned of the truth somehow and been an enemy. Be that as it may, she's dead, and there ends my hopes. Or is it possible to get Larimore to give me the clew to the secret she held?"

He considered this point long and carefully. Larimore would not tell anything willingly. Could it be learned from him by strategy?

The miner was still meditating when sounds in the other room announced the arrival of some new person. A man's voice sounded, and there was something so familiar about it that Ben went to the connecting door.

Tight walls and doors were not any too numerous in the house, and he gained view of the other room.

"Luke Haggerty!" he murmured.

The man was there! He and Mrs. Haggis stood facing each other, and Ben's first impression was that there was no good will between them. The woman was speaking.

"Sure," she exclaimed, "you needn't come around here and try to vent your spite; nobody's afraid of you."

"Who said there was?" growled Haggerty.

"You act as if you wanted to scare me to get hunk with somebody else who has disgruntled you. Drop it! It won't work! I could send you to the closest cell of Sing Sing, if I wanted."

"How about Dan Haggis, with his high-sounding name of Willis Larimore?" snapped Haggerty.

"Would you harm my laddie?" cried the woman, intemperately.

"Would you harm me?"

"Sure, I'd kill you if you did harm to my laddie."

"I shall do him none as long as he uses me well. If it comes to a fight, I can tell as much about him as he can about me. Yes, by thunder! I kin send him ter everlastin' grief!"

Mrs. Haggis shook her fist in the visitor's face.

"Do it, av you dare. Do it, and I'll make mince meat av you. See?"

"Come, come, old lady!" replied the caller, cooling down, "this is folly. Dan and I get along like two angels. There ain't no quarrel between us two."

"There will be between us if you says me any more."

"You'll have to excuse me, old lady. Fact is, I am in bad temper to-day. I've been looking fer a man. His name is Ben Richardson. I want ter find him, an' when I do I am going ter do him up ter stay. See? Jest let me git my hands onter him an' he is a gone goose. He's got in my way, but he's going ter get out on't. I'm goin' ter do him up! Where is he? Show him ter me!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MONTANA MINER'S CHANCE.

Haggerty's bad temper was breaking loose again, and he doubled up his fists and glared around unpleasantly. He did not frighten Ben. The miner was not sure whether the rough had clew to his

presence or not, but he would not have been reluctant to meet Mr. Haggerty then and there, if it was forced upon him.

The woman of the den was not worried either.

"You had better go and put your head a-soak," she evenly replied. "Your brains must be heating up. Anyhow, no more ravin' here. I want you to keep still or get out."

Luke puffed out his cheeks and scowled at Mrs. Haggis in ugly ill-will, but it was very clear she was not afraid of him.

"A fine place Gardner has lured me into!" muttered Ben. "Maybe he thinks I will stay in it. That's where he is in error. I'm not afraid of the gang when I am awake, but they would just as soon murder me in my sleep. I get out before sleeping-time, and, when away, I shall stay."

"Where is Dan?" inquired Haggerty presently.

"Don't know," snapped Mrs. Haggis.

"I've lost him. Fact is the police are most too lively, and they forced me to go it on my own hook. I tramped the streets until I got nigh here, an' then I come in. I want to see Dan—Willis Larimore. I mean, an' see wot his plan is. We are a bit hard-pressed, an' I don't like it."

"He won't be afraid o' the man that has scared you."

"Won't he? won't he? Don't you believe that. Larimore is no chicken, but he is afeard o' the man who worries me. Ben Richardson is dangerous. Willis fears him more than I do, because he has more reason."

"Pah! Fears him? That's a lie! My laddie fears nobody. Why should he fear this Ben What's-his-name?"

"Ask him! All I kin tell you is that Larimore realizes that if he don't do Ben up he will get done up by Ben. Fact! There's an old grudge to settle between them, and I reckon when it's settled one will be dead."

"Pah! It won't be my laddie. It can't be. Say!"—and Mrs. Haggis swooped down upon Haggerty—"if you don't protect my lad, I'll kill you myself!"

"Let him stand by me, and I'll stand by him. I'm a square man in all ways, but I hev to be used well. See?"

Ben Richardson gazed out at the person who thus proclaimed his good qualities and marked how much like a jail-bird he looked.

"That's where he ought to be, and I intend to send him there," mused the miner. "I know now who robbed Mrs. Snow, and I will estab'ish my innocence—but then, I'm charged with pushing her from the picr, and that's a cat of very different color. How the dickens shall I clear myself? Looks as I am in a hole for good and all."

The twain in the outer room talked for some time longer, but in a more subdued and amiable way. Finally, as the night-shadows fell, Luke rose and left the house.

"Coast is clear," muttered Ben. "My opinion is that I should go while it remains so. Haggerty and Larimore are a bit rattled, and they may both be around later. Between the two I might get hurt. I'll get out while I can, making an excuse to the old woman that I want a bit of air. So I do, for this den is odoriferous."

When it was fairly dark Ben left the room, and, after making the excuse decided upon, passed out of the house and to the street.

The miserable lamps were burning in the more miserable block, and slovenly, brutal-faced men and women moved here and there, but it was not a scene of much vivacity or press of numbers.

The miner went the length of the block at good pace; then he turned into another street. He seemed to breathe freer, but new questions were presented to him.

He was homeless. Where was he to spend the night? Would not watch be upon all hotels and lodging houses?"

"Where shall I rest the crown of my weary head?" wondered Benjamin.

This line of thought was quickly dissipated as he came full upon a familiar form and face.

"Kelma Downing!" he muttered.

It was, in truth, the adventuress! Finely dressed and glittering with more than one jewel, she was moving serenely along the worst part of the city by night, and her manner had never been more confident.

She had seen him before his own discovery, and, as they were then almost face to face, she accosted him with a smile.

"So we meet again!" she exclaimed.

"It does seem like it, I confess," Ben answered.

"Have you changed your quarters?"

"Well, just a bit."

"And do you live near here?"

"Yes."

"That's a mistake."

"How so?"

"You are capable of having a better home," earnestly explained the adventuress. "You have talents; why not use them so as to make money and live in comfort?"

The Man from Montana heard with some surprise. He eyed Kelma closely. The business air about her was not to be taken in any other than a serious way.

"Can you suggest a way in which I can do all that?" he asked.

"Go into partnership with me, and I will show you how."

"How many partners do you want?"

"One!" was the emphatic response. "I easily comprehend that you refer to Willis Larimore. I am not wholly pleased with him as a partner; he is not of the same rank in life as you. He is all well enough, but you—well, I think you are a magnificent animal," frankly, replied the adventuress.

"That, surely, is pleasant to hear. But that won't get me cash."

"I will. Go with me, and I'll furnish the money—not without your aid and effort, of course. I take it you are not dead in love with the law. I am not. I don't mind making a living by my wits. Do you?"

"Not at all," answered Ben, as readily, as if he meant it.

"Then go into company with me. I am every inch a business woman. I have brains, cunning and good looks. With them a woman, aided by a bold and skillful man, can keep money on hand by the bushel."

"But would not Larimore object?"

"Doubtless! What of it?"

"He has no good will to me. He has several times attacked me, and he would do so again. If he hates me now he would hate me worse if I stole his business partner."

"Do you mind that?"

"It wouldn't break my heart. Still, why should he hate me now? What is the cause of his enmity?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't that odd?"

"I won't lie to you; I do know. If you and I go into partnership, I will explain the whole business. Will you do it? If so, we'll leave New York this very night. In another city we will begin life anew, so to speak, and I'll furnish all the plans. You can depend upon me to make business hum, too. Will you do it?"

Benjamin was nonplussed. He had no desire or intention of going into partnership with her, or to break the laws of any State, but he wanted to keep in her good graces, if possible, and seek to get the better of the wily Larimore through her help.

He tried to be crafty.

"To tell the truth," he answered, "I had formed other plans. I have a lay-out that promises something, and I don't know whether it would pay me to give it up. The only thing that would influence me is that I should have you for a partner."

"Then you are not indifferent to me?"

"I know a good thing when I see it," forcibly replied Ben, "and I see a mighty good combination now."

Kelma looked much gratified.

"Then you had better decide as I wish."

"I must have time to think this over. Fact is," added the miner, going deep to find excuses, "I should not be in this miserable neighborhood were it not that I have put a large sum of money into this new venture of mine. I can't leave town all of a sudden, and before I give up my own plans I must try to get my money back. I must have time to arrange things."

"Are you sincere?" asked the adventuress promptly.

Benjamin did not like to deceive even such a woman, but there was too much at stake to let such things worry him.

"That is always my style."

"Then I will give you two days to arrange your affairs. Will that be enough?"

"I think it will."

"Go ahead! But, mind you, you are not safe here."

"Why not?"

"There has been a rush of persons, you know, to this vicinity lately. Within the twenty minutes before I met you I saw Willis Larimore, Luke Haggerty, Irad Charleston, the detective, and one or two of his men. All are probably near now. This is a dangerous vicinity, I say!"

"Maybe I had better keep out of it to-night. I surely want to—"

"Hush! Here comes Larimore! Be on your guard! You cannot evade him. Watch that he does not do you fatal harm. Look out!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MINER'S FRIENDS AND FOES.

Kelma had time to say no more. Larimore was advancing hurriedly, and the Montana man's observant eyes noticed that his expression was decidedly hostile. He swept a quick glance at Kelma as he came on, and the miner caught the full meaning of the interruption.

Larimore was jealous, and there was fresh fuel for his antagonism to the man from Shagbark.

He almost rushed up to them, and, with his gaze bent upon Ben, excitedly demanded:

"What's the meaning of all this?"

The Man from Black Butte returned the regard with cool unconcern.

"To what do you refer?"

"I'd like to know why the dickens you are talking with this woman?"

"Lady, sir, lady!" amended Kelma, warmly.

"Why are you two together?"

"That's our business," she replied, shortly.

"I will make it mine!"

"You had better not. Here is a magnificent animal"—she waved her hand to Ben—"who would eat you at one mouthful."

"I am not to be bluffed!" asserted the adventurer. "There is treachery here. Richardson, you and I will settle it right away!"

He raised his hand to strike the supposed rival, but Kelma caught his arm. Larimore, mad with anger, turned and dealt her a blow with the flat of his hand which sent her reeling back against the wall of the nearest house.

Next he turned upon Ben, who was coolly waiting for him, and with a bull-like rush, he essayed to dispose of the western delegate without delay. Twice he struck with full force, but both blows were parried with ease; then the miner, believing it was time for him to do something himself, sent out a stroke that caught Larimore under the chin.

The crook was felled like an ox smitten by the butcher.

He sprawled his length on the sidewalk, while Kelma, gasping more with rage than anything else, thickly uttered: "Coward! Villain! Dog!"

Ben stood smiling, while Larimore struggled to his feet. His face had a

sort of purple tint, as if he was tending toward apoplexy, but there was not so much sign of a desire to fight further.

Now, Larimore had reason to know that Haggerty was near, and anxiously glanced around to see if he was within sight, but what he saw was several others approaching. His ambition oozed away; his fever for fight was gone, and, turning, he hastened off down the block.

Ben was about to offer his aid to Kelma, if it was needed, but the new party of men were at hand. The foremost was Edmund Gardner, and, just as Ben was congratulating himself on the fact, he recognized the lawyer's companion.

It was Irad Charleston!

Had due time been vouchsafed him, the miner would gladly have followed Larimore's example, but he saw that he had been recognized already in return, so he stood his ground.

He eyed the detective closely, to see what his expression was, and it proved to be very unsatisfactory. Charleston looked at him with a sort of gloomy intentness that did not promise anything favorable.

Gardner's face was full of good humor, and he exclaimed:

"Here you are, I see! Let me introduce you to each other, gentlemen."

"Unnecessary!" interrupted Charleston. "Mr. Richardson and I have met before."

"I am glad to see you again," replied the Montana Miner, nervously.

"I hardly think that, and I hope it is not true. Mr. Richardson, I have an unpleasant duty to perform!"

"Unpleasant!" echoed Gardner, uneasily. "How is that?"

"Just what I want to know," added Ben.

"I must arrest you!" answered the detective.

"Arrest him? Come, now, Charleston, don't say that. The theory is all exploded. True, there have been some few little brushes in the past, but they were unauthorized efforts of your men. Charleston, you are too old and wise to do this thing."

"Fortunately, I am not judge or jury, and if Mr. Richardson succeeds in proving his innocence on trial, nobody will rejoice more than I. This, however, is a different matter. I must do my duty."

The Man from Montana folded his arms. He noticed vaguely that Kelma had seized the chance and disappeared, but his chief concern was with his own interests.

"I shall make no resistance," he declared.

"That is wise of you, young man. Go with me quietly, and you will find friends in me and my son. We will both speak well of you, and I heartily trust this cloud can be brushed away. Law is law, however, and I am an officer, so I must do my duty."

"But the man is not guilty!" insisted Gardner.

For the first time since their acquaintance Ben saw the Englishman excited. Gardner was thoroughly moved, and seemed capable of any extravagant action.

"I hope somebody will appear to prove it," asserted Charleston.

"The somebody is here!" exclaimed Gardner. "I am that man!"

"What do you know?" asked Charleston.

"Mr. Richardson was with me at the hour when it is said this Snow woman was pushed from the pier!"

Stoutly the Englishman made the declaration, and Ben was the most astonished person present. He never had met Gardner until after the tragedy on the pier, and this assumption was astonishing to him.

The detective looked puzzled.

"With you!" he repeated, "and not near the pier?"

"Nowhere near it."

"And can you prove an alibi for him fully?"

"Of course I can. He was not near the

pier. Consequently, he cannot have been the man who did the deed."

Bravely the false testimony was uttered, but it did not produce the results that usually come of such a declaration. Ben, wondering into what new difficulties the false claim might get them, stood with downcast eyes, and the detective looked at them both in perplexity.

"I don't understand this," he admitted.

"What is there that is dark?"

"Roger Hanks says Richardson did the deed."

"Who is Hanks? What is Hanks? What does he know about this case? Hanks is a low, brazen fellow of the docks. Gentlemen of the jury, my client cannot be justly held on this charge—oh! I beg your pardon, gentlemen, I had forgotten where I was!" and Gardner laughed uneasily.

"You say Richardson was with you?"

"Didn't you hear me say so?"

"And what do you say?" demanded Charleston, abruptly turning to the miner.

Ben did not know what to say. As much good will as Gardner had shown, it looked as if he had done no good. The detective had no power to release a prisoner, and on trial it was not likely that the Englishman would repeat his story.

About the only things clear were that Gardner had proved his good will, and that Detective Charleston was mystified. Ben remained silent.

"Remarkable!" murmured the officer.

"So, you see, you can let Ben go with me," added Gardner.

"I wish I could see it that way. Mr. Richardson is my son's friend, and he has been a pleasant acquaintance to me. I should be glad to see him go free, but the law knows no favorites, and an honest detective should know none. I am sorry, but I shall have to take Mr. Richardson to Police Headquarters."

"I protest!" cried the lawyer. "He shall not go!"

"Sir?" mildly replied Charleston.

"He shall not go!" repeated Gardner, with hot haste. "I answer for him—and, if necessary, I'll fight for him, too! He shall not go! You shall take him only over my dead body!"

Excited and angry was the Englishman, and the detective looked supremely surprised to see so august a man in such a role, but Ben here broke in quietly:

"Mr. Charleston, there shall be no trouble over this. Let me speak privately to our friend for a moment, and all will be well. Will you kindly step a little aside?"

The detective hesitated.

"It will give you chance to flee if you should wish—"

"A chance I shall not seek to improve. Be of good faith. I give my word of honor to put myself at your service."

"Enough, sir! I know I can trust you."

Charleston walked away a short distance, and Ben turned to Gardner.

"We must give in," he remarked, evenly.

"No!" declared the lawyer. "I am in this struggle for you, and I shall stick. My life is told; I'll stand by it. It is too late to weaken; I'll keep my lie up if I get my neck stretched for it!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ROGER HANKS SPEAKS.

The Man from Montana was not indifferent to such stout devotion to his interests.

"You are a good friend, Mr. Gardner," he replied.

"I shall prove it. This detective shall not take you away. Together, you and I can whip the boots off of him, and when it's done, you can flee. There is room enough in New York for you to hide."

"This must not be."

"No?"

"Decidedly not," asserted Benjamin. "It would only do me harm, while as

for you—are you not a lawyer of England?"

The older man's face fell.

"Yes."

"Would you want your old friends there to know of your being in such an affair as you suggest? Think of your eminent position! Surely, you would not break the laws of any land. Remember what you are!"

"Confound it! Why am I what I am?" sharply retorted Gardner. "I am a law-abiding man, but this case—this is different! You go to prison? Atrocious!"

The speaker swung his arms excitedly, and his depth of emotion was surprising. Ben knew then, if not before, what a stout and loyal friend he had in the man from over the seas.

"Bear in mind that I am innocent! Therein lies my hope. I have nothing to be ashamed of, and I trust to the law to free me later, as it now mistakenly seizes me. Let us submit, sir, and all will end well. Let us submit."

Gardner sighed deeply.

"I suppose it will have to be so," he responded, "but it is atrocious, atrocious!"

"Don't look at it so gloomily. I have faith in justice, human and divine. Now, let me put myself at Charleston's disposal. Ha! yonder come two men, and I do believe one of them is my arch-foe, Roger Hanks, the watchman. I want to see that man. If I must go to prison it would do me a pile of good to lick the ugliness out of that fellow before I go, and I shall try it if I can. Let us see what he has to say now."

"His companion is a police inspector, whose name I forget."

"We will see them both."

Hanks and the inspector were close at hand, and Ben hastened to put himself near Charleston. He intended to meet the trouble with all due composure.

He noticed that Hanks did not have his usual brazen manner. He walked with downcast eyes, and his step seemed weak.

"The fellow has given all his time to this blackmailing scheme of his, and has worn himself out with his passions," thought the miner.

Mr. Charleston saluted his superior.

"Mr. Inspector," he observed, "I present to you the wanted man, Benjamin Richardson!"

"Have you arrested him?"

"Yes."

"What has he to say for himself?"

"That he is innocent."

"Does he dare repeat that in my hearing?" asked the superior officer.

The Montana Miner folded his arms.

"He does, he dares!" declared Ben. "My plea is—Not guilty!"

The inspector shot a quick glance toward the night-watchman.

Roger Hanks raised his drooping gaze suddenly from the earth.

"It is true!" he cried. "It is true! Richardson is not guilty!"

"What?" cried Edmund Gardner.

"He is innocent—or he may be. I know not how it is, but I do not know that he is guilty."

"Then why have you said he was guilty?" demanded Irad.

"I lied!—I lied! I thought he was guilty, and—fool that I was!—I tried to get money from him to keep his supposed secret. The more he refused, the more I was certain he was guilty. My own misdeeds blinded me to the truth. I don't know who pushed the woman from the pier; I have no evidence that it was this man."

"You would have lied his life away!" exploded Gardner.

"I was mad, wicked. It was a man with a full beard who did it, but more than that I know not."

"You have told a good deal more."

"I repent it now—I repent it bitterly. Judgment has come to me! My life has been made a living perdition by my lie! I am haunted! Oh, gentlemen, pity a poor wretch who has paid dearly for his sins!"

Roger Hanks threw up his hands toward the darkened sky with a despairing gesture. Ben thought it was the act of a deranged man, but he was careful not to express this opinion when the next words revealed what belief was in the mind of the inspector. That official turned to Irad.

"You see how it is, Mr. Charleston," he remarked. "We have nothing on which to base a charge against this man; we shall have to let him go free, though I would like some assurance that we can find him when he is wanted. You have said that you know him personally?"

"I do, sir."

"Have you faith to believe he will submit himself to friendly investigation on our part—that he can be found when wanted?"

"I do think so."

"And I promise it!" exclaimed Ben. "I have nothing to be afraid of; you can see me whenever you wish, sir."

"Enough, young man! I ask no more. Charleston, you and I will go now."

The detective turned to Miner Ben.

"I hope," he earnestly spoke, "that you do not think I have used excessive zeal in this matter? I have so much trouble at home that I am most unwilling to make trouble for others; but I had an official duty to perform."

"My good man," responded Ben, quickly, "don't give this a thought. You have been more than considerate, and I shall always feel grateful to you. You are a trump card, by George!"

"I thank you for this tribute to common consideration of man to man. Mr. Richardson, we shall expect to see you at our home soon. Duty now calls me away. Will you visit us soon?"

"You bet I will!" assured the miner.

"Good-night, then!"

Charleston hurried away after his superior. Gardner, Ben and Roger Hanks were left together.

The watchman had relapsed into total abstraction. He stood with lowered head, and seemed wholly unconscious of what was passing around him. His eyes had a strange glare, and his face twitched in a peculiar manner.

He showed no signs of making any move himself, and, as Edmund Gardner's gaze was bent upon him with extreme severity, Ben decided to see what the watchman had to say for himself.

"Well, Roger," he began, "what next?"

Hanks looked up quickly, and, it seemed, in fright.

"I am haunted, haunted!" he cried, wildly.

"Ghosts are bad! What does yours do to you?"

"A ghost cannot do more than appear, but, if it appears, it is a punishment for sin, and sure sign of death for the one who sees it."

"So I have understood," gravely agreed Ben.

"I am a doomed man," groaned Hanks; and he turned his gaze toward the river.

"I am supposed to be on duty in the warehouse now," he added. "I have neglected that duty, and the warehouse is without a guard. I ought to go there, but—I fear to go alone. I—I wish I had somebody to keep me company through this night, with its darkness, silence and load of horrors."

Ben glanced at the Briton.

"How would you like us for company?" the miner asked.

"Oh! if you would go—if you only would!" wailed Hanks. "It is terrible to be there alone; to meet the awful silence and the haunting presence. Terrible!"

The Englishman was looking dissatisfied, but Ben took him to one side and explained.

"Hanks is half-crazy with remorse, fear, derangement, whisky, or something of that sort. Of course he does not intend us to take his story of a ghost seriously. If we use the fellow well, and humor him a bit, I shall gain his good

will, and it will help me when I come to trial, if I ever do."

"Excellent idea!" assented Gardner.

"We will go with him. Tell him so."

The watchman brightened up when assured that he was to have company, and the three set off toward the warehouse. Ben believed he could find no better place to sleep.

They reached the place and Hanks unlocked the door.

"Summon your fortitude," he directed.

"You will have a terrible night!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE WAREHOUSE.

Hanks led the way to the part of the warehouse he usually occupied. It was a gloomy structure to strangers like Gardner and Ben; but they were not timid, and they gave that fact no heed.

The Montana Man was glad to be there. The warehouse was associated with the late important events in his life, and from one window he could look out and see the pier where he had met the woman who had fared so badly afterward, and from which Roger Hanks had seen just enough of the affair there to give him a wrong impression.

The watchman made his guests as much at home as possible. He had plenty of chairs, and he placed them and had the two men sit down.

"This is comfortable," remarked Ben, looking around.

Hanks shivered.

"Wait until the ghost comes," he exclaimed.

"We will keep your mind so much occupied that you will not think of the ghost," answered Ben.

"That will not prevent the ghost from coming."

"Surely you don't mean to say you really think you see something here?"

"I don't think it. I know it. The ghost does come!"

Both visitors began to evince more interest. They had looked upon the ghost as something figurative—a creature brought up by the watchman's fancy, and not even supposedly visible—but his persistence awakened fresh suggestions.

"What is it like?" asked Gardner.

"Beast, bird or demon?"

"It is the ghost of a human being—of a woman!" explained Roger.

"How the dickens is that?" demanded Ben.

"I don't know how it is; but it is the ghost of the woman who was drowned off the pier. All is clear! It comes to me because I wrongfully accused you."

"And you really have believed you saw something here?" questioned the lawyer.

"I have seen it three times. It has appeared to me—the woman that was drowned. It haunts this warehouse, and flits about the place—a white form that is awful to look upon. Of course, there is but one explanation: My death is near!"

Hanks buried his face in his hands and rocked to and fro in mental distress.

Ben and Gardner exchanged glances, and the lawyer touched his forehead. He thought Roger was going crazy, but the miner was not so sure the matter was one solely of a diseased mind. He was inclined to believe the watchman had seen all he alleged, and the only question was, Who was playing ghost?

"Tell us all about it," requested the man from the West.

Roger was not reluctant. He told all, explaining how he had seen a white-robed figure with the form and hair of a woman; how he had at first believed it to be a woman who had entered to get shelter cheaply, and how he had, in consequence, tried to capture and drive her out, but all to no purpose.

Whatever the creature was, it or she had evaded him. He could find it neither by night or day, though it had three times appeared to him, ghostly, terrible, mysterious and elusive.

"Bah!" exclaimed Gardner. "It is

just what you first thought—a common intruder and cheap lodger."

"I know better. It is a ghost!" persisted Hanks. "It will come! You will see it! Then you'll know how terrible it is. It is a sure sign that I am to die early!"

There was no shaking him in this belief, so they let it rest; but Ben Richardson had grown still more interested.

"We will capture this ghost, if such a thing be possible!" he declared. "I feel a strange interest; and I have a theory that—but I suppose it is impossible."

Hanks was not in mood to help; but Ben and Gardner laid elaborate plans, formed on account of the previous movements of the alleged phantom. If it was capable of being captured they intended to do it.

Time wore on. Roger had just life enough left to realize that duty required him to make his regular rounds, as usual; but he insisted upon Ben keeping him company.

The clock in his room pointed to half-past twelve when he started on one of these rounds. As before, he had Ben by his side.

They went over the required area and then started back to the watchman's room. The miner was walking with lowered head, when Hanks suddenly grasped his arm violently. The watchman's eyes seemed about to jump out of their sockets.

"Look! Look!" he gasped.

Benjamin obeyed. Not far ahead of them, where the shadows were deep, a human form—that of a woman—was moving along with a slow, light, strange step, it seemed, and it was a form clad in white from head to foot.

"The ghost!" huskily uttered Roger.

"Good! good! Follow me, and we will have her highness in short order. What! she enters your room. She must have seen you on your rounds and believed the coast clear. Hallo! What now? By George! Gardner has got her!"

The phantom had disappeared, but from the room came loud cries of fright and dismay.

Hanks shrunk back, but Ben bounded forward. With a few strides, he reached the door and entered, and what he saw did not surprise him in the least. A woman was struggling in the lawyer's arms.

"I have her!" cried Gardner; "but she's got muscle. Give me a hand! I never knew ghosts were so strong before."

Ben gave the assistance, and the woman was quickly subdued. When it was done, she stood panting, and might have fallen but for their aid. All of her strength had waned and left her.

At her feet was a white robe, and she was now dressed in black, and in style like other women.

"Flesh and blood!" commented Gardner; "a woman, and one of refinement and some beauty, though not a child in years."

There was no answer, and he turned to Ben. What he saw surprised him, and he peevishly added:

"Now, what's struck you? Have you got the ghost fever, too? You are pale, your limbs shake under you, your eyes are too large by far. Are you really scared, or—"

"This woman, this woman!" cried Ben. "It is—"

"A woman of the flesh, sure."

"It is Mrs. Snow!"

Edmund Gardner started back so violently that he nearly lost his grasp upon his charge.

"What?" he almost shouted.

"It is the woman who has been supposed to be drowned! It is Mrs. Snow! This is nothing to you, but it is much to me. Let me ask her—what! she has fainted in your arms! Fainted? Maybe she is dead! Great heavens! if she is dead I am ruined! I need her, and need her desperately. Man, man, do you know anything of women in swoons? If so, get to work with haste. She must be—she

must be saved. This is nothing to you, but—

"Nothing to me?" shouted Gardner. "Well, I should say it was something to me! Why, I crossed the Atlantic Ocean to see her, to find her!"

"Why? What is she to you?"

"She is the woman who can tell where Paul Alaric Anderson is!"

"What do you know of Paul Alaric Anderson?"

"I know I was sent to America to find him!"

"You—you?—to find Paul Anderson?"

"Yes."

"Have you found him?"

"Just what I want to know!"

"What do you mean?"

"This evening I told you I would defend you if my neck was stretched for it. That was strong language for a lawyer to use. Do you know why I was so wrought up? I have been to Slippery Alley. I have heard of a man you may know. What do you know of Paul Anderson?"

"I am Paul Anderson!"

"The son of Philip and Margery Anderson?"

"Yes."

Gardner laid the unconscious woman on the watchman's couch. He rushed forward, seized Ben's hand, and shook it with fervency.

"Found, found!" he cried, his voice rising high, and joy beaming in his face.

"And you—you—do you know who my family are?" demanded Ben, excitedly.

"Yes. I have been hunting New York all over for you. My talk of desiring to write a book was all moonshine. So was my reference to Nature's casting off the decaying branches of the tree of life. I was wandering day and night in the slums of the city, and I had to have some excuse for it. I took the most plausible one. I am too practical a man to deal in senseless theorizing."

"But if you knew I was Paul, as your defense of me seems to indicate, why didn't you make the fact known to me?"

"My suspicion had but just been aroused. We have met several times, and I took a liking to you, but it was not until the very last day that I got near the truth. I have been in many places in the poor quarter—simply because I knew your parents had once lived among the poor—I have dived into slums, dens, and dangers, and I've had others dive for me, too, but it was only a few hours ago that I struck Slippery Alley. From a Marm Gregor there, so-called, I had my news. She told me of you, of your recent call on her, and said you were now known as Benjamin Richardson. Judge what a tremendous surprise it was to me! I had sought Paul Anderson—I then learned that I had been personally acquainted with him, and knew it not."

"This seems incredible!" murmured the miner.

"If you are Paul, it is true; and, strangest of all, we have the desired witness here, alive. Alive! Amazing! Why, all had thought her dead. It is easy to see that, somehow, she escaped from the grasp of the river, came here secretly, and has been in hiding since—though why she should act so strangely I know not."

"She is not fully herself. Did you notice her peculiar expression? Her trials have preyed heavily upon her; she is partially flighty-minded, no doubt. But she—was she the woman? Were you the man who corresponded with her about Paul Anderson?"

"It was partially I, but chiefly my business partner who wrote the letters to her. I was sent on as an agent. I came to New-York, but I could not find her."

"She is found now—if this is the woman we think."

"It is she. I have seen a recent picture of her which he sent. This is Eunice Ray, alias Mrs. Snow. My quest is ended—you are found!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A LAST DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

At ten o'clock the next morning Irad Charleston approached his house with a slow but firm step.

"This matter is finished satisfactorily," he murmured, "and I should feel well content were it not for my poor boy's troubles. How they will result, or what they really are, I can't guess. He declines to apply for a divorce from the Downing woman, and there is something to it all that I can't fathom. This is wearing on me!"

It was a patient statement, but the honorable detective's face gave proof of its truth. He loved his children, and the unhappiness that had come upon Albert was a severe blow to him.

He applied his key and entered the house. He would have gone up stairs at once, but the parlor door was open and he saw that a caller was there. He recognized Willis Larimore.

The adventurer jumped to his feet at once.

"I want to see you, sir!" he cried, with a belligerent air. "I have been talking with your son, and he and I can't agree. I want your opinion—unless your son objects!"

There was covert meaning to this last clause, and the whole was of such a nature that the detective passed into the parlor.

Albert was there, and looking most miserable.

"Fact is," pursued Larimore, "I want some money to skip away from New York, and I am going to have it or make myself disagreeable. If I get the shiners, I'll leave and let you both alone, but money I must have without delay—"

"You will not get a cent from us!" declared the detective, firmly.

"Then I will tell all I know—unless," added the adventurer, glancing again at Albert, "I can make terms with your son."

"I refuse to let him make terms."

"Then the whole world shall know where he was last Summer."

"He was in the West. What of it?"

"If he has told you so he lies. He was not out of this State. Now, I've told a little. I'll out with all of it unless you come down with the dollars."

Albert suddenly rose.

"You need not go to that trouble," he quickly cried. "I'll tell the miserable truth at once."

"Speak, my son," directed Irad.

"I have told a part—how I fell in love with Kelma Downing, whom I first saw as a saddle rider in the Park, and how I married her. I know now that I was deliberately spared. When I told you I was going West I really went to Herkimer County, and thought to spend a blissful Summer with the woman I had married in such haste that I knew you would not approve of it. Let me be brief on the events of that rural calamity."

"Better go into details," sneered Larimore.

"With Kelma went this man, Larimore, one Luke Haggerty, and more of their kind. While there they robbed a bank of much money. I was deceived as to their purpose, and was along with them on the trip, though not within two hundred yards of the bank. I never suspected it was to be robbed, and did not know it had been robbed until the newspapers published the facts."

"I remember the case," observed Irad.

"Do you see more? I was brought into it because I was your son, and they thought I was a bulwark of safety through you—a prominent detective. Miserable night! We were rowed across the lake by one Hick Ransom, but whether he knew of the contemplated robbery I know not. Certain it is they cheated him out of promised money, and he has since been in New York to get satisfaction. I know only of my own case; I had no part in the robbery, but I was trapped.

I never dared to tell you I did not go West, or that I was in Herkimer. This is the whole miserable business. You know it now, father; the secret is out. I will keep it no longer."

"Have you helped yourself any?" asked Larimore, with a fresh sneer. "I still demand my money. Do I get it, or shall I tell all to the police? I have two to bleed now, not one."

"We refuse to give you a cent!" cried Irad, in hot anger. "Ignoble wretch! We shall part with no money to buy your silence!"

"Then you will part with your reputation!"

The doorbell rung. It so happened that the family servant was passing through the hall, and, when the door was opened, several persons entered quickly. They as promptly hastened into the parlor.

Ben Richardson was at their head, and close behind him were Kelma Downing, Edmund Gardner, and Roger Hanks.

Willis Larimore's expression became one of consternation, and he looked at Kelma with a paling face. She gave him little time to think it over. She was eager to talk, and came into the conversation with dash and vigor.

"I can guess what this means!" she exclaimed. "Yonder man is seeking to play the vulture. Don't you fear him; there is no need of it. The bank robbery scare peters out under the light of truth. Albert Charleston never had hand in it, or even knew it was to be done. He is wholly innocent, and I will swear it in a court of law!"

"Fool, fool!" murmured Larimore, under his breath. "I have trusted a woman in a matter of crime, Fool!"

"I have more to tell," added Kelma, swiftly. "Our good Sir Ben Richardson came East to shoot a man who had shot him out in the wilds of Shagbark Camp, in Montana. That man was really Willis Larimore! Yes, it was he. Ben has wrongfully thought it was Albert. It was not."

"Kelma," implored Larimore, "will you be still?"

"I will not!" she flashed, bitterly. You went West to make yourself safe after the bank robbery. You had letters, and the like, belonging to Albert, and you passed yourself off out there as Albert. I know it, for I used to write to you there under that name. I know not why you took his name. More, when you came back you told me how you had shot and robbed a miner whose name was Ben Richardson!"

"The game is up!" the man from Montana muttered, yet loud enough for all to hear.

"More, Larimore could all along have told of the mystery of the so-called death of Mrs. Snow. Chance made him conversant with her affairs. He saw her, and was trying to work some scheme upon her when his tool, Luke Haggerty, foiled it all by robbing Mrs. Snow on the pier. The mysterious man who followed her that night was Haggerty."

"This is not exactly news to me," put in Irad Charleston. "I have been suspicious of Haggerty, and, last night, I arrested him on suspicion. He is now in prison charged with robbing the woman on the pier."

"Then you have scored a detective triumph," declared Kelma. "It was Haggerty."

"I had no hand in that," weakly put in Larimore. "I am innocent."

"Bah!" scornfully cried Kelma. "You cry baby so soon, do you? It will be your cry for many moons to come. Scoundrel! you thought it was a manly thing when you struck me, didn't you? You see the results; I have done this to repay the blow!"

"I have something to say myself," now interrupted Ben. "Brighter days have come for all of us. Until of late I have never known what my family history was. I now announce that I am Paul Anderson, son of Philip, and grandson

of Thomas Anderson, of England. My parents early incurred the wrath of my grandfather, and they came to New York, disinherited, poor, and unfortunate. They lived in poverty until they died. Of late Thomas Anderson's heart has softened. He has tried to find his descendants and succeeded, though I am the only one.

"It was all through one Eunice Ray, who had been a favored but faithless servant of my parents. She had repented, and negotiations were under way when, as Mrs. Snow, she seemed to perish by the pier.

"She did not perish there. She caught hold of another pier, as she was drifting riverward, held fast and drew herself to solid land, after which she fainted. Later she managed to crawl to the warehouse near, and there she has since been. She was slightly deranged, but she found and ate crumbs left by workmen, and thus lived. She is now in our care, and she will live many years yet.

"It proves that the package she thought was dashed into the river by Haggerty was really stolen by him—the same that he pawned and which I recovered. It contained, among other things, my mother's marriage certificate."

"The story is told!" added Edmund Gardner. "Friends, let me introduce you to"—he placed his hand on Ben's shoulder—"Paul Anderson, grandson of Thomas, of England, and heir to two hundred thousand dollars. My mission is ended."

Within a few weeks Larimore and Haggerty were in prison. Kelma was not prosecuted, and suddenly left New York, never to be seen there again. Hick Ransom disappeared, but later sent a letter to Ben, saying that he was "alive, but done with New York." More of him is unknown.

Gardner, Ben and "Mrs. Snow" sailed for England. All remained there a year. Then, Thomas Anderson having died, Ben returned with his fortune to his native land. He had been very well treated in the land across the seas, but there was no place like home to him. He returned to Shagbark, and became one of Montana's most prominent citizens—as he now is.

It was found that the marriage of Albert to Kelma was wholly illegal, so peace fell upon the Charleston household. They hear often from the Man from Montana, whom they number among their best friends, though he lives far away among the Black Butte Hills.

THE END.

NEXT DIME LIBRARY, NUMBER 921!

Buffalo Bill's Quandary;

OR,

VELVET BILL'S VOW.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

Beadle's Dime Library.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

- 883 The Man from Mexico in New York.
- 872 The King-Pin Shark; or, Thad Burr's Ten Strike.
- 861 The Tenderloin Big Four
- 853 The Quaker City Crook.
- 844 Tracked to Chicago.
- 836 The Policy Broker's Blind.
- 829 The Frisco Sharper's Cool Hand.
- 821 The Tramp Shadower's Backer.
- 813 The Sham Spotter's Shrewd Scheme.
- 806 The Grand Street Gold-Dust Sharper.
- 798 Detective Burr's Luna in Witness
- 792 The Wall Street Sharper's Snap.
- 784 Thad Burr's Death Drop.
- 742 Detective Burr Among the New York Thugs.
- 734 Detective Burr's Foil; or, A Woman's Strategy.
- 728 Detective Burr, the Headquarters Special.
- 713 Detective Burr's Spirit Chase.
- 706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
- 698 Thad Burr, the Invincible; or, The "L" Clue.
- 690 The Matchless Detective.
- 680 XX, the Fatal Clew; or, Burr's Master Case.

BUFFALO BILL NOVELS

By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.

- 915 Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon-Scout.
- 909 Buffalo Bill's League; or, Red Butterfly.
- 904 Buffalo Bill's Tangled Trail.
- 900 Buffalo Bill's Rough Riders.
- 895 Buffalo Bill's Secret Ally.
- 890 Buffalo Bill's Life-Stake.
- 882 The Three Bills: Buffalo Bill Wild Bill and Band-box Bill; or, The Bravo in Broadcloth.
- 874 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Braves.
- 869 Buffalo Bill's Road-Agent Round-up.
- 863 Buffalo Bill's Death Charm.
- 857 Buffalo Bill's Royal Flush.
- 851 Buffalo Bill's Double Dilemma.
- 845 Buffalo Bill's Redskin Ruse.
- 830 Buffalo Bill's Boys in Blue.
- 826 Buffalo Bill's Sharp Shooters.
- 822 Buffalo Bill's Best Bower.
- 816 Buffalo Bill's Red Trail.
- 812 Buffalo Bill's Death-Knell.
- 794 Buffalo Bill's Winning Hand.
- 787 Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot.
- 781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
- 777 Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower.
- 769 Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake.
- 765 Buffalo Bill's Dozen; or, Silk Ribbon Sam.
- 761 Buffalo Bill's Mascot.
- 757 Buffalo Bill's Double.
- 750 Buffalo Bill's Big Four; or, Custer's Shadow.
- 743 Buffalo Bill's Flush Hand.
- 739 Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, The Masked Driver.
- 735 Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.
- 731 Buffalo Bill's Beagies; or, Silk Lasso Sam.
- 727 Buffalo Bill's Body Guard.
- 722 Buffalo Bill on the War-path.
- 716 Buffalo Bill's Scout Shadowers.
- 710 Buffalo Bill Baffled; or, The Deserter Desperado.
- 697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
- 691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail; or, Mustang Madge.
- 667 Buffalo Bill's Swoop; or, The King of the Mines.
- 658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
- 653 Lasso King's League; or, Buck Taylor in Texas.
- 649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
- 644 Buffalo Bill's Bonanza; or, Silver Circle Knights.
- 362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 329 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

By Buffalo Bill.

- 889 The Ranch King Dead-Shot.
- 820 White Beaver's Still Hunt.
- 807 Wild Bill, the Wild West Duelist.
- 800 Wild Bill, the Dead-Center Shot.
- 639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
- 599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pards of the Plains.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 52 Death-Trail, the Chief of Scouts.

By Leon Lewis, Ned Buntline, etc.

- 773 Buffalo Bill's Ban; or, Cody to the Rescue.
- 632 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
- 629 Buffalo Bill's Daring Role; or, Daredeath Dick.
- 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail; or, The Express Rider.
- 153 Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
- 117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.
- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 908 The Doomsday-Den Detective.
- 899 The Double-Quick Detective.
- 893 Yellow Gid, of Dark Divide.
- 885 The Expert Detective's Shake-up.
- 875 Trapping the Race-Track Judge.
- 864 The Police Special's Dilemma.
- 844 The Gentle Sharper's Combine.
- 841 Graydon's Double Deal.
- 832 The Sport Detective's Grip.
- 823 The Athlete Sport About Town.
- 808 The Crook-Detective's Pull.
- 790 Plunger Pete, the Race Track Detective.
- 782 Royal Rock, the Round-up Detective.
- 774 Steve Starr, the Dock Detective.
- 764 The New York Sharp's Shadower.
- 738 Detective Claxton, the Record Breaker.
- 714 Gabe Gall, the Gambler from Great Hump.
- 703 Spokane Saul, the Samaritan Suspect.
- 692 Dead-Shot Paul, the Deep-Range Explorer.
- 655 Strawberry Sam, the Man with the Birthmark.
- 646 Dark John, the Grim Guard.
- 638 Murdock, the Dread Detective.
- 623 Dangerous Dave, the Never-Beaten Detective.
- 611 Alkali Abe, the Game Chicken from Texas.
- 596 Rustler Rube; the Round-Up Detective.
- 585 Dan Dixon's Double.
- 575 Steady Hand, the Napoleon of Detectives.
- 563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Honey-suckle.
- 551 Garry Kean, the Man with Backbone.
- 539 Old Double-Lark, the Wily Detective.
- 531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
- 521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
- 513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
- 506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
- 498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
- 492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
- 486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
- 479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
- 470 The Duke of Dakota.
- 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
- 455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
- 449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
- 442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
- 437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 385 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 279 The Gold Dragoon; or, California Bloodhound.

ALBERT W. AIKEN'S NOVELS.

Dick Talbot Series.

- 741 Dick Talbot's Close Call.
- 737 Dick Talbot in Apache Land.
- 733 Dick Talbot, the Ranch King.
- 729 Dick Talbot's Clean-Out.
- 725 Dick Talbot in No Man's Camp.
- 384 Dick Talbot in the Rockies; or, Injun Dick.
- 354 Dick Talbot; or, The Brand of Crimson Cross.
- 349 Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
- 107 Dick Talbot, of Cinnabar.
- 93 Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
- 41 Dick Talbot in Utah; or, Gold Dan.
- 38 Dick Talbot's Iron Grip; or, The Velvet Hand.
- 36 Dick Talbot; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
- 35 Dick Talbot at the Mines; or, Kentuck, the Sport.
- 34 Dick Talbot's Foe; or, Rocky Mountain Rob.
- 33 Dick Talbot at White Pine; or, Overland Kit.

Aiken's Fresh of Frisco Series.

- 825 Fresh, the Race-Track Sport.
- 660 The Fresh in Montana; or, Blake's Full Hand.
- 652 The Fresh's Rustle at Painted City.
- 647 The Fresh at Santa Fe; or, The Stranger Sharp.
- 556 Fresh, the Sport; or, The Big Racket at Slide Out.
- 537 Fresh Against the Field; or, Blake, the Lion.
- 529 The Fresh of Frisco in New York.
- 497 The Fresh in Texas; or, The Escobedo Million.
- 461 The Fresh of Frisco on the Rio Grande.
- 173 The Fresh in Arizona; or, California John.
- 130 The Fresh in Mexico; or, Captain Volcano.
- 97 The Fresh in Big Walnut Camp; or, Bronze Jack.
- 77 The Fresh of Frisco.

Aiken's Joe Phenix Series.

- 865 The Female Barber Detective; or, Joe Phenix in Silver City.
- 799 Joe Phenix's Great Blue Diamond Case; or, The New York Sport at Long Branch.
- 793 Joe Phenix's Decoy; or, The Man of Three.
- 760 Joe Phenix's Lone Hand.
- 749 Joe Phenix's Big Bulge.
- 745 Joe Phenix's Mad Case.
- 708 Joe Phenix's Siren; or, The Woman Hawkshaw.
- 700 Joe Phenix's Unknown; or, Crushing the Crooks.
- 681 Joe Phenix's Specials; or, The Actress Detective.
- 637 Joe Phenix in Crazy Camp.
- 632 Joe Phenix's Master Search.
- 628 Joe Phenix's Combin; or, the Dandy Conspirator.
- 620 Joe Phenix's Silent Six.
- 601 Joe Phenix's Shadow; or, the Detective's Monitor.
- 419 Joe Phenix, the King of Detectives.
- 391 Joe Phenix's Still Hunt.
- 161 Joe Phenix's Great Man Hunt.
- 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective; or, The League.
- 79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.

Aiken's Miscellaneous Novels.

- 901 The Hotel Swell-Sharp; or, The Siren Shadower.
- 892 The Countryman Detective.
- 876 Gold Button Sport; or, The Miner Sharps.
- 842 Teton Tom, the Half-Blood.
- 835 The King Pin Detective.
- 814 The New Yorker Among Texas Sports.
- 775 King Dandy, the Silver Sport.
- 753 Gideon's Grip at Babylon Par.
- 717 Captain Pat McGowen, the Greencoat Detective.
- 674 Uncle Sun Up, the Born Detective.
- 670 The Lightweight Detective.
- 665 The Frisco Detective; or, The Golden Gate Find.
- 613 Keen Billy, the Sport.
- 607 Old Benzine, the "Hard Case" Detective.
- 594 Fire Face, the Silver King's Foe.
- 585 The Silver Sharp Detective.
- 577 Tom, of California; or, Detective's Shadow Act.
- 570 The Actress Detective; or, The Invisible Hand.
- 562 Lone Hand, the Shadow.
- 520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
- 490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
- 475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
- 465 The Actor Detective.
- 440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
- 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
- 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
- 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
- 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
- 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
- 363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
- 320 The Gentle Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
- 252 The Wall Street Flood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
- 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
- 196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
- 101 The Man from New York.
- 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
- 84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
- 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heat of Fire.
- 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
- 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
- 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
- 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
- 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
- 49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
- 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
- 31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.

NEW ISSUES.

- 920 The Montana Miner in New York; or, The City Detective's Tangle. By Wm. H. Manning.
- 921 Buffalo Bill's Quandary; or, Velvet Bill's Vow. By Col. P. Ingraham.
- 922 Gilbert Goldspur, the Dandy Sport; or, Dark Dan & Co., Detectives. By J. W. Osbon.
- 923 Old Sunflower, the Hayseed Detective; or, Between the Lamb and Wolves. By A. W. Aiken.

JUST ISSUES.

- 916 Two Dead-Square Sports; or, the Fairy Belle Bonanza. By Wm. R. Eyster.
- 917 Doubly Disguised, or, Tom Worth's Full Hand. By Wm. Mason Turner.
- 918 The Double Edged Detective; or, The Sharper-Doctor's Dire Deal. By Jos. E. Badger.
- 919 The Sea Scout; or, The Patriot Privateer. By Burke Brentford.

A new issue every Wednesday.

Beadle's Dime Library is for sale by all Newsdealers, ten cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of twelve cents each. BEADLE & ADAMS, Publishers, 92 William street, New York.